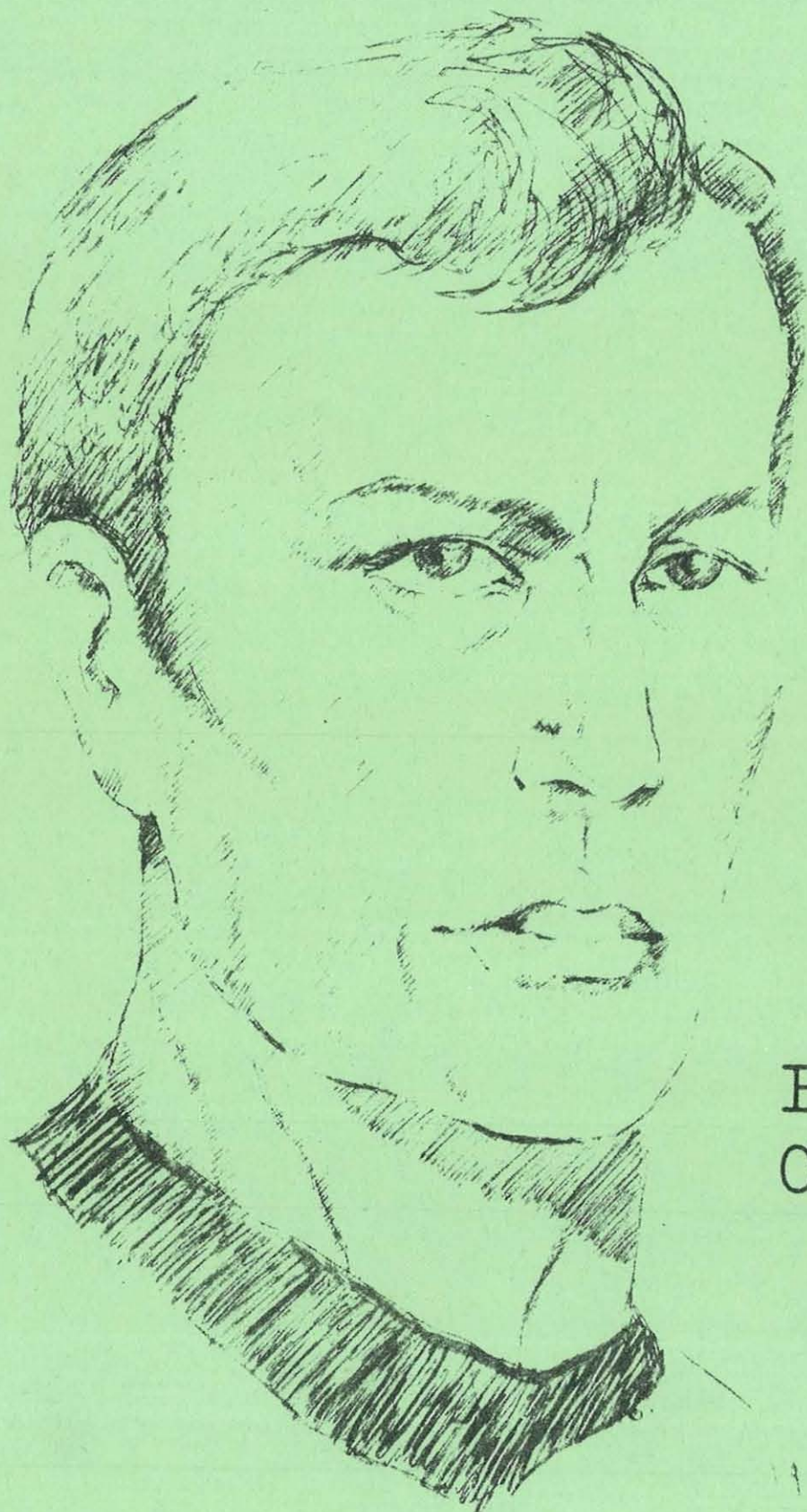


REPEAT MISSIONS 3



Baillie
Collected

a *STAR TREK*
fanzine

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A STAG Publication

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Repeat Missions 3, price £1.15 within the U.K., is put out by the STAR TREK Action Group and is obtainable from -

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
by Dundee
Scotland.

Foreign price - \$6.00 airmail, \$4.00 surface. If you pay by dollar cheque, bank draft, please add \$1.00 per total order to cover bank charges.

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Welcome to Repeat Missions 3. RM 3 is a slight departure from our previous issues of Repeat Missions, in that all the stories in it are by the one writer - our friend from the Security Section of the Enterprise, Mr. Baillie.

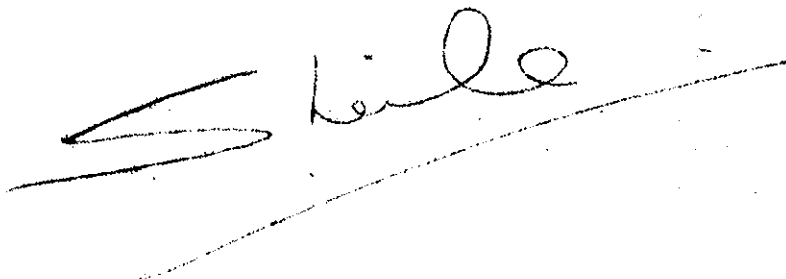
Mr. Baillie's first anecdote was recounted in STAG Newsletter No. 18, and quite a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then. It was a competition entry, and Valerie told me later that she carried the story around for several days before she plucked up the courage to send it in. Mad rash fool! If she'd known where she was to end up, I wonder if she'd still have sent that story in?

Since then, Mr. Baillie has been a fairly regular member of the Log Entries staff, and a very popular character. However, all of his stories that appeared in Log Entries are now out of print, and for reasons of storage (we don't have enough space) we aren't keeping LE in print. So we decided to gather all his stories together into a 'Baillie Collected'.

As well as the stories that have already appeared, the zine contains two never-before-printed stories. Perhaps it isn't fair to put new stories into what is actually a reprint zine; but we wanted to keep all the Baillie stories so far written together.

Perhaps Mr. Baillie will return to duty shortly; at the moment, he's on an extended R & R (Valerie thinks he's just being lazy, mark you.) I'm sure we all hope that we'll hear more from him soon.

January 1980

A handwritten signature, likely 'Valerie', is written in dark ink. The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'V' and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right. Below the signature, there is a faint, horizontal line.

THE ATTACK.

Sooner or later they all get round to it.

"What's he really like?" they want to know, "He" being of course Commander Spock, First Officer of the Enterprise, and a Vulcan.

My answer usually depends on how much I've had to drink at the time. I guess I didn't think too much about it one way or the other at first. A starship security officer isn't usually given to asking too many questions about his superiors - better just to get on with the job. At least nobody ever pulled any strokes when he was around; some people tried it, but only once - he'd hand you that frozen stare, and cut you down to size without really trying.

Well, like I say, I kept my head down, and stayed out of his way as much as possible. I ran into him once, though, and after that I changed my mind about him more than somewhat.

I'd been working in Hold Four on the cargo deck, helping out Dr. Tarrant and her team of geologists. They were cataloguing some new specimens, and needed a hand with the heavy work. My shift was just about over, so I finished up, and set off back to my quarters, making plans for the evening. Just as the door to Hold Four closed behind me, the Red Alert went off, and the call to battle stations came over the intercom. In this situation you don't hang about, so I'm heading towards the turbo-lift when suddenly the world blows up in my face.

When I come to, the place is full of smoke, the lift doors are blown in, and the damage alert warnings are sounding full blast. I decide I'd rather be somewhere else at this point, so I'm heading off down the corridor when I run into Spock at the intercom; he's talking to the Captain, and by the look on his face, you'd think he was discussing the weather.

"Spock out," he tells the Captain; then he sees me.

"Mr. Baillie," he says, "are there any more security personnel on this deck?"

"I don't think so, sir," I tell him. "It was just about the end of the shift, and the replacements wouldn't have arrived yet. What happened?"

"The Captain informs me that we have been attacked by a Romulan cruiser, and our deflector shields have been seriously weakened. Damage is severe in this area; life support systems are unreliable, and there is a risk of fire in the cargo holds, as the heating circuits have been overloaded. In addition, the turbo-elevators are not working, so we are effectively trapped here until Mr. Scott can effect repairs."

"Excuse me, sir," I say, "but Dr. Tarrant and a team of geologists were working in Hold Four; they must have been trapped there."

He turns back to the intercom, and speaks to the bridge. When he comes back he looks even more frozen-faced than usual.

"We have a problem, Mr. Baillie. Hold Four seems to be an area of high risk; repairs cannot be undertaken until the Romulan attack has been defeated. If the circuits break down in the meantime, Dr. Tarrant and her team will certainly die."

"Transporter?" I ask, pretty sure even then that it was too simple a solution.

"Contra-indicated, Mr. Baillie. Our power reserves are too low. It seems that we must attempt to effect a rescue."

He tells me to check the corridor to Hold Four, and I find that fire has already broken out here; the emergency doors have locked automatically, and will stop the fire spreading to where we are, but there's no way through.

Meanwhile the Romulans are still attacking. We're hit badly just then, and I go sprawling across the deck. I'd have crashed into the bulkhead, but Spock grabs hold of me, and keeps me on my feet. I hang onto him until the ship settles down, and I'm thinking that he must be a lot stronger than he looks to keep his own balance, and support my weight as well.

Then it turns out that at the same time he's been working on the problem of getting to Hold Four. I've heard McCoy call him "that walking computer," and I guess that just about sums him up, because he turns to me and says, "The inspection crawlway, Mr. Baillie. I believe I can use that to reach Hold Four, and bring Dr. Tarrant's people back through to this safer area."

It seems to be the only idea around, so I open up the access hatch; the crawlway is clear of smoke, but it's getting pretty hot, so he doesn't waste any time.

"Please remain here, Mr. Baillie," he says. "The doctor will undoubtedly require your assistance at this end. I shall send everyone through as swiftly as possible."

"Yes, Commander," I reply. "Uh, good luck, sir."

He raises an eyebrow at me, but mercifully doesn't stop to give me a lecture on the non-existence of luck. He's soon out of sight, and I've nothing to do but wait.

I'm just starting to feel nervous when I hear sounds from the crawlway, and Dr. Tarrant's people are coming through, six of them, some bruised, some with burns, but none of them seriously hurt. I look them over, then do a recount.

"Where's Mr. Spock?" I ask.

Dr. Tarrant peers anxiously along the tube. "He should be coming," she says worriedly. "He thought it might be possible to shut off the heating circuits in Hold Four in case they overload and spread the fire."

"I wish he'd get a move on," I grumble. To tell the truth, I'm getting anxious myself. The Romulan attack isn't letting up any, the heat is steadily getting worse, and I'd rather get Dr. Tarrant's people - and myself - well away from the fire area. I'm just thinking about sticking my head into the tube to see if Spock's coming, when I hear a muffled explosion, and a blast of smoke pours out of the access hatch. When the smoke clears I go back for a look, and I can see that the crawlspace has collapsed.

The only thing I can do is get the geologists well away from the area, then go looking for another intercom station.

At this point, I'm wishing myself in a more comfortable location, say a Klingon R & R base, because it's up to me to break it to Captain James T. Kirk that his favourite Vulcan is missing in the path of an explosion. I'll gloss over the next few minutes, except to say that some of his expressions are new even to me. When he's calmed down a bit, he tells me to stay where I am until a rescue team reaches us. They've disposed of the Romulans, he tells me, and damage control are already on the job.

It's about an hour later, though, that they get to us, and it's

the top team in person. When Kirk comes through the door, I find myself very busy paying attention somewhere else; I don't want to see that look on a man's face ever again. I take over, and guide the security team to where the geologists were working. From the look of things, this part of the ship took quite a pounding. We've got floor plates buckled, wiring hanging loose, smoke everywhere. What we haven't got is one Vulcan Science Officer.

We reach the circuit control panel, and it's obvious he's been working on it. Scott takes a look.

"Spock managed to shut off the controls," he reports. "It's lucky he did, or the circuits would have overloaded, and the damage would have breached the hull."

Can't leave an engineering problem alone, our Scotty; he goes back to check the wiring for himself, then pulls back with a cry of pain.

"The metal must have been red-hot when Spock was working on it," he says, "and it's my guess that some of the wiring flared up in his face."

"Find him!" says the Captain, and we take one look at him and spread out.

Spock didn't get far; I spot the blue shirt at the end of the corridor and raise the alarm. Kirk beats me to him by a mile, and when I get there he has the Vulcan's head on his knee. McCoy's not far behind, and he gets to work fast. Spock's face is badly burned, and from where I am I can't see his hands, for which I'm grateful.

"His eyes, Bones?" It takes me a couple of seconds to recognise the Captain's voice.

"I can't tell; we must get him to sickbay," McCoy says, the same desperate anguish in his face.

Scotty doesn't say anything, just picks Spock up and heads off down the corridor. I'm about to make a tactful exit when McCoy notices that I've picked up a few knocks myself, and orders me to join the party.

In sickbay one of the nurses patches me up, while McCoy works on Spock - at this point I get a glimpse of his hands, and I feel sick. Seems, though, that's the least of McCoy's worries - it's his eyes that are the problem. It takes quite a while to complete the tests, and when McCoy says Spock can't see, I go cold; but then he says something about an inner eyelid, and that the optic nerve is undamaged - he'll be blind for a couple of days, but his sight will come back. Kirk doesn't say anything to this, but he sits down suddenly, and drops his head into his hands. McCoy leans over and says something to him, but the nurse has finished with me, and packs me off, so that's the last I see of them for a bit.

When it's all over, we find out just what happened. By shutting off the circuits, Spock prevented an explosion which would have breached the hull; that in turn would have ruptured our deflector shields, and, "Goodbye, Enterprise."

Now, say what you like about Vulcans having no emotion, but the way I see it, they must feel pain just as we do. Spock worked on those circuits with his hands on fire; if he hadn't stuck to it, I wouldn't be talking to you now.

So, if you catch me when I've had enough to drink, and ask me, "What's he like?"

I'll tell you that every man on the Enterprise would follow him blindfolded into Hell; and they'd know he'd bring them out again.

MURDER TWICE REMOVED by Security Officer Baillie

For a Starship Captain, James T. Kirk has some pretty odd ideas at times; take shore leave, for instance. Most Captains insist on crews reporting back on time, correctly dressed, and sober. When Jim took over the Enterprise, he took one look at the crew, another at the charge-sheet after the last shore leave, and promptly had a fit at the amount of trouble involved. As usual, his devious mind came up with a way round it; he pulls everyone in twenty-four hours early, regardless of what shape they're in, and gives them a day to sober up and settle down.

Seems to work - we've had no trouble so far; well, not of that sort, anyway. After a rather nasty experience when Scotty, in a fit of misplaced enthusiasm, tried to smuggle a gorgeous Aldebaran stripper on board, the Captain likes to have a Security officer on duty in the transporter room to give the crew members the once-over, and confiscate any contraband they just might happen to absent-mindedly bring on board.

Which explains why I'm hanging around chatting to Kyle while he's beaming up our wandering boys and girls. We're in the middle of a friendly argument over the attractions of a couple of girls we'd met, when the communicator signals someone waiting to beam up. We break off while he does the necessary. It's Spock, of course. I might have known - he's always **first back**. You'd think he didn't like shore leave, or something.

"Welcome aboard, Commander," I say. "I hope you had an enjoyable leave."

"Thank you, Mr. Baillie, most pleasant. I had the opportunity to visit the Institute of Science. Professor R'Ley and I had some most absorbing discussions on the theory of mathematics. When the Captain comes aboard, please inform him I will be on the bridge."

As he goes out, Kyle and I just look at each other. I mean, so O.K., he's not Human, but you'd think that after months in space, he'd want something a bit more relaxing than mathematics!

Next to return are Lt. Uhura and Christine Chapel, and it looks like they've bought up the entire planet. I'm looking at all their parcels and boxes, wondering how they intend to manage; I soon find out.

"Dear Mr. Baillie," coos Uhura sweetly, "I'm sure you can find a couple of men to help Christine and me with all this?"

For a smile like that, I'd round up Admiral Kor himself, and make him carry the entire load three times round the Enterprise on his head. However, Kor not being available, I call for a couple of Security men, help them load up, and collect another million-watt smile for my efforts. Some lady, Uhura. Pity she's a lieutenant...

I expect trouble with our next visitor, and I get it. Scotty is not drunk - not exactly - but he's getting on that way. He's clutching about eight bottles of Saurian brandy, and he's very talkative. I have visions of spending the next three hours listening - in detail - to Scotty's doubtless disreputable adventures, and I also have the problem of separating him from the brandy. Then I get a flash of inspiration.

"I think Mr. Spock is looking for you," I tell him. "I heard him say he was on his way to Engineering."

Scotty eyes me like a Klingon who's just been confronted with a shipload of tribbles. "Engineering, is it?" he rumbles ominously. "We'll see about that. Here, hold these, laddie."

He hands me the bottles and marches off to do battle for his beloved engines. Quite what he thought Spock would do to them I don't know, but I put up a fervent prayer that he wouldn't meet our First Officer in the corridor.

I stack the bottles on one side to dispose of later, and get back on the job. The crew are reporting in thick and fast now, and my pile of contraband grows steadily. At last things quieten down a bit, and I look up from my checklist.

"That just leaves the Captain, Dr. McCoy, Sulu and Chekov," I tell Kyle.

"Funny," he comments. "The Captain's usually one of the first back. There's the communicator, perhaps that's him now."

It's not, though - it's Sulu and Chekov. I have to try pretty hard to keep a straight face as they materialise; Sulu's bad enough, but poor Chekov looks as if he died three weeks ago and someone forgot to tell him.

"Hi, Pav," I call over, "have a good leave?"

He doesn't answer, just groans very quietly, and shudders. When Sulu stops laughing, he tells me, "I found him in a bar in the red light district. Out cold, couldn't even remember what day it was, so I thought I'd better bring him along."

"It's just as well, the Captain's due back any time. Take him to his quarters, and let him sober up."

To tell the truth, I've seldom seen anyone in as bad a state; he looks out on his feet, and his eyes are sort of fixed and staring.

"Maybe you'd better take him to sickbay," I suggest. "He looks like he's got more than a hangover to me."

"Perhaps. I'll see how he is after he's had some sleep. You know what our pet witch-doctor is like." Give Sulu his due, he's pretty concerned when he sees how bad Pav looks. "Come on, Russian wonder boy. Bed time."

As they go out, Kyle activates the transporter again, and this time it's the Captain and Dr. McCoy.

This looks like being a bad, bad day, because McCoy looks like a candidate for his own sickbay. He's white as a sheet, with a couple of cuts on his head, and he's limping badly. I alert a medical team, and go forward to help the Captain.

"What happened?" I ask.

"Hit and run," says Kirk. "We were on our way over to the transporter station when it happened, so we decided to come straight up. It's a miracle you weren't killed, Bones."

"I'm all right," says McCoy testily. "Just a few bumps."

"I've alerted sickbay," I tell the Captain. "Did you get a look at the driver?"

"No, it all happened so fast, and I was more concerned with Bones, but I'd like to get my hands on whoever it was."

"Probably kids joy-riding," I suggest.

"Probably. Well, come on, Bones. Sickbay. Captain's orders."

So now we've got the whole crew back we can get on with normal routine. Twenty-four hours later, with everyone sobered up, we leave orbit, and head off to where-ever Starfleet Command in its wisdom has decided to send us:

First clue I get that anything is up comes a couple of days later. I'm in the rec room chatting up a pretty young yeoman I've had my eye on; she's just getting interested in my sparkling personality when the ship's intercom undoes all my good work.

"Security Officer Baillie to the Captain's quarters!"

My immediate response to this is a hasty examination of my conscience. I want to have my answers ready. The only thing I can come up with is one bottle of Scotty's brandy that got sort of accidentally lost on the way to disposal, but the Captain couldn't have found out about that. Could he?

Anyway, I don't hang about too long; James T. Kirk is not the most patient of characters, and a summons to his quarters instead of the bridge sounds ominous. Turns out, though, it's not a private party. Spock is there, looking about as concerned as I've ever seen him: by which I mean that his right eyebrow is up about two millimeters as he reads through a report the Captain hands him as I come in. McCoy, though, looks worried enough for both of them. Last time I'd seen him he seemed to be recovered from his accident, but now he looks terrible. Scotty is muttering something under his breath, and from the tone of his voice, somebody has an unpleasant couple of minutes coming.

"Sit down, Mr. Baillie," says the Captain. "We are going to need your help." At once I compose my features into an expression of helpful attention, but he doesn't seem to notice. "You will remember that as Dr. McCoy returned from shore leave he was the victim of a hit and run driver. At the time we put it down to an unfortunate accident. It seems we were mistaken."

My ears prick up at this.

"There have been other... incidents... since. Nothing serious, but all potentially dangerous. Last night we had this." He holds up some sort of gadget that I don't pretend to recognise, though I've seen McCoy handle one. "Last night Dr. McCoy was about to treat Mr. Chekov for an infected hand. He was about to use this scalpel to lance the infection when something went wrong, and it pierced his own hand. Thinking it was just a faulty instrument, he completed the treatment, but later he became very ill. Luckily, Nurse Chapel had kept the scalpel; becoming suspicious, she examined it, and found that the blade had been poisoned. Thanks to her, Dr. M'Benga was able to treat McCoy in time. This scalpel had been tampered with, and substituted for the one McCoy intended to use on Chekov. It seems clear, Mr. Baillie, that someone on this ship is trying to kill Dr. McCoy, and I want him found."

To say I'm surprised at this is some understatement. I mean, McCoy of all people! I can't imagine anyone having a reason to want him dead.

"To begin with, Mr. Baillie," the Captain goes on, "we must take every precaution. Apart from Nurse Chapel and Dr. M'Benga, we are the only ones who know what has happened. I want you, personally, to keep an eye on Dr. McCoy. We must get to the bottom of this. I don't want to involve the entire security section, as we can't risk warning the killer."

"I'll look into it, sir," I promise him.

"Look, Jim, I don't need a nursemaid," growls McCoy. "I'm on guard now, and I can..."

"Bones, can't you see? We don't know who the killer is, and in sickbay you are vulnerable. Let Mr. Baillie do what he can."

"I suppose I must."

We finally work it out that while McCoy is on duty, I'll be out of sight in his office, ready to act if anybody tries anything. Scotty will share his quarters at night, and for the rest of the time we'll all take it in turns to keep him in sight.

As I go off to arrange my shifts, I'm doing some heavy thinking. Anyone could have arranged the hit and run accident, but the sabotage in sickbay is quite a different kettle of fish. The way I see it, how could the killer be sure that McCoy would use that particular scalpel? The substitution must have been made between the time it was laid out, and the time it was actually used. Seems to me this narrows the field somewhat.

I make a detour via sickbay, and corner Nurse Chapel; she's not much help though. She laid out the instruments for McCoy herself, then they were called away to an emergency. When they got back, Chekov was waiting, and McCoy started work right away. Looks like anyone could have made the substitution while the room was empty.

Right about then, I decide to go for some coffee and a meal - me getting ulcers won't help any. I'm sitting in the rec room thinking hard and getting nowhere, when I spot Chekov at another table with one of the passengers we picked up at the last stop. (Normally, of course, we don't carry civilians, but their ship had engine trouble, and as their destination was on our route anyway, we took them along.)

It comes to me then that I've seen Pav with this guy a couple of times, and it surprises me a bit; he's not the type Chekov usually hits it off with, somehow. He seems to be doing all the talking, and Pav is just sitting there with a sort of wooden look on his face. After a bit he nods, and the guy gets up and leaves. Being incurably nosy, I get myself another coffee, and move over to join Chekov.

"Hi, Pav," I say. "How's the hangover? That was some skinful you had back there." To tell the truth, I'm wondering if he's really got over it yet; he doesn't look right somehow - his eyes are too bright, and though he looks pale, he looks sort of feverish at the same time. As I sit down, he looks over at me, and it's as if he has to struggle a bit to focus on me. Then he gives a start, and grins, and I see the familiar Chekov.

"Hi, Baillie. I feel fine, thanks. Funny, I don't remember much about that bender I went on. Sulu hasn't let up about it though. He's going to make one crack too many pretty soon."

We sit talking for a bit, then he leaves for the bridge, and I'm back with my problem. Now, I wouldn't let on to the Captain, but I've got a personal stake in this. McCoy pulled me through once when I'd been pretty badly smashed up, and though I make the usual cracks, I've got a healthy respect for Blue Eyes.

Seems to me that playing it Kirk's way leaves too many loopholes. The killer is likely to start getting suspicious at never seeing McCoy on his own: all he'd have to do is hold off for a while, then move in when we were off our guard.

Then I get a brainstorm; the thing to do is to lay a trap for the killer and flush him out. I think I know just how to do it, too. I swallow the last of my coffee, and head off to see the Captain.

A couple of hours later, the grapevine spreads the news through the ship that poor old Baillie has flaked out on the bridge. Very proud of that act, I am, even though I did have some help from McCoy's little yellow pills. Yes, very spectacular. Very convincing, too; at least I hope so, because McCoy's life depends on how well we've fooled the killer. The situation is that I'm supposed to have this weird illness that I can't even pronounce; that I'm being kept in the isolation ward; and that McCoy is taking care of me himself, trying to find a cure. The Captain and the others are well out of sight, and we're hoping that the killer will take the chance to strike while Bones is on his own apart from one (supposedly) unconscious patient.

Which is why I'm lying in bed in the isolation ward giving a perfect impersonation of something nasty. The lights are dimmed, apart from one over McCoy's desk, and from where I'm lying, I get a good view of him. He's a lot calmer than I am, that's for sure. Our biggest gamble is that the killer won't risk using a phaser, knowing that its power would be picked up by the sensors, and Security alerted; we reckon he'll go for the quiet approach to give himself a chance to escape. I'm sweating more than somewhat as I lie there, because if I'm wrong.....

I freeze as the door of the isolation ward opens, and someone comes quietly in; I can't see his face - the lights are too dim. McCoy must have heard him, but doesn't move; he's sprawled over his desk as if asleep. He's not short on courage, our McCoy - I don't know if I could just sit there waiting to be attacked, and relying on the reactions of someone else to save me.

The figure stands in the doorway looking round the ward; I go on playing unconscious. I can't risk acting too soon, as this just might be an innocent visitor looking for Bones. He comes further into the room, and then I see he's got a wrench in his hand - the traditional blunt instrument, I suppose. That does it for me. Luckily I'm fast on my feet, and I'm across the room before he realises I've moved. As I close with him, I'm wondering what I've let myself in for. He's fighting in silence, but with a kind of frenzied desperation. For a bit, I have my work cut out to hold on to him, but I'm used to this sort of roughhouse, and once I get the wrench away from him, things are much easier, and at last I manage to knock him out.

Meantime, McCoy has pushed the panic button, and help is on the way. The lights go up as the Captain, Mr. Spock and Scotty rush in, and I can see that my prisoner is wearing Starfleet uniform. This I do not expect. Even less do I expect what comes next. Scotty turns the body over (none too gently) with his foot; and it's Pav Chekov.

Right about then, you'd think the Enterprise was running a contest in eyebrow-raising, but Spock beats us by a mile; it's the closest thing to surprise I've ever seen on his face. I guess he saw more of Chekov than the rest of us, and you can tell he's really floored for once. McCoy gives Pav a sedative to keep him out a bit longer, and Scotty dumps him on the bed I've just unceremoniously vacated; then we all stand round gaping at him for the next couple of minutes.

McCoy is the first to break the silence.

"Why? Why Chekov?" he asks dazedly.

Of all of us, it's Spock, the half-Human, who recognises McCoy's shock and distress. He pushes Bones gently into a chair.

"Some brandy, I think," he murmurs. "Perhaps Mr. Scott will oblige."

A few minutes later, Mr. Scott does oblige. As he passes me with the glass in his hand, he gives me a wink, and grins, and I know he's done it again. Somehow he's smuggled some of that triple-damned Saurian brandy on board. I'm just making plans for a suitable revenge, including doing something very nasty to his engines, when I get reminded of the business in hand.

The Captain has been looking at Chekov; now he turns to the rest of us.

"Well, gentlemen, we must come to a decision. What are we to do about Mr. Chekov? Incredible as it seems, he is responsible for attempting to murder Dr. McCoy. I suppose he must have substituted the scalpel himself while he was alone in sickbay; now we have the evidence of our own eyes." He sounds as bewildered as I feel, and no wonder. It's a terrible job for any man, to try one friend for the attempted murder of another.

"Well, I dinna believe it!" Scotty breaks in angrily. "I don't care how it looks, Chekov wouldna' harm Bones, I'd stake my life on it."

"Indeed, I am forced to agree," puts in Spock. "It is totally out of character. Captain, in the exceptional circumstances, I am prepared to meld with Mr. Chekov without his consent. I am convinced we do not yet know the whole story, and I may be able to learn something." At Kirk's nod, he leans over Chekov, and takes his head between his hands.

Now, I've never fancied this mind-link business myself. Don't get me wrong, I'd trust Spock with my life, but the idea of someone else wandering about inside my head gives me the shudders. Doesn't seem to bother the Captain,

though. - I've known him link with Spock on several occasions, and more than once the Vulcan's weird powers have got us out of a sticky situation.

We stand around watching Spock, scared to make a move in case we break his concentration, until he lets Pav go and straightens up.

"It seems your confidence in Mr. Chekov has been well placed, Mr. Scott," he says. "As I hope to demonstrate, he is as much a victim as Dr. McCoy; in effect, he himself is the murder weapon. If I may trouble you, Dr. McCoy?"

He's really got me this time - I just can't see what he's getting at. As Bones goes over to the bed, Spock brushes back Chekov's hair, and we see a small scar just above his ear.

"If you will open up this scar, Doctor, and remove what you find there, I am confident we will make progress."

McCoy gives him a sharp look, but doesn't argue. We stand back a bit to let him work, and when he turns round, he shows us a small metal capsule he has removed from under Chekov's skin.

"Mr. Scott, your opinion, please," says Spock.

Scotty takes it gingerly, and has a good look. "It's a radio receiver," he says slowly, "very small, not very long range, but effective over short distances."

"Effective enough for its purpose," says Spock, and if I didn't know better, I'd say he sounded angry. "I sensed its presence during the mind link. More important, however, I managed to reach deep into Mr. Chekov's mind, and I have some of the answers. During his last shore leave, Mr. Chekov was drugged, presumably by the killer, and the receiver inserted. Under the drug, his natural resistance was broken down, and he was placed in a deep hypnotic state. In this condition he was trained to respond to orders transmitted through the receiver. When he awoke, he was unable to recall what had happened to him. Thereafter, he could be placed in a trance at any time by broadcasting a code word; he was then programmed to obey whatever instructions he was given. Another code would bring him out of the trance, and in his normal waking state he would forget what he had done. It was a most ingenious plan; had it not been for my knowledge of Mr. Chekov's character, and my telepathic abilities, the receiver would never have been discovered, and Mr. Chekov would have been deemed guilty of the attempts on the Doctor's life."

"So we're still back where we started," says Kirk heavily. "Chekov is innocent, but the killer is still on the ship, and we are no nearer to finding him. If he's really determined to kill Bones, he could try again himself."

Right then, I get one of my well-known flashes of inspiration.

"Captain, I think I know who we want." I tell him about the man I'd seen with Chekov in the rec room. "You know he doesn't normally mix much with civilians," I go on. "He did look a bit odd at the time - I guess he must have been coming out of a trance when I spoke to him. I thought it was just the tail-end of his hangover. If I had only realised."

"There was no way you could have known," replies the Captain. "We are only too thankful, Mr. Baillie, that you spotted it. However, we still have problems. We need hard evidence - and I still want to know why he wants Bones dead."

Spock has taken the receiver back from Scotty, and he's looking at it. Then he says, "I believe the evidence will not be too difficult to obtain. The killer has no way of knowing that we have discovered the capsule. It is my belief that he will eventually issue further instructions. If we relay the transmission into the ship's computer, we will not only have a record of his intentions, but also a voiceprint identification which will stand up in court."

"See to it, please, Mr. Spock," the Captain tells him. "Bones, I think we should bring Chekov round, and explain it all to him."

As Spock and Scotty go out, McCoy gives Chekov an injection, and pretty soon he comes round. The poor guy is naturally somewhat surprised to find himself the centre of attraction in the isolation ward - last thing he remembers is going off duty on the bridge. Kirk and McCoy break it to him as gently as they can. Poor Pav! It knocks him all of a heap - he's white with shock, and almost crying by the time they get through. McCoy is real nice about it though, and finally makes him see that it wasn't his fault. There's times I think our tame witch-doctor can overdo the sarcastic bit, but when you really need him, he turns up trumps. By the time Spock and Scotty get back, Pav's good and mad; he's ready to take on our pet killer with his bare hands, and looking at him, I reckon he could do it, too.

Anyway, armed with our evidence, we all take off to arrest the killer - according to the passenger list, he's a bloke named Charles Ryan. When he opens the door, he comes the outraged innocent citizen act, but when Spock plays over the taped evidence, he decides to come clean. It's pretty much as Spock worked it out. He met Pav on shore leave, recognised he was from the Enterprise, and drugged him under the pretence of buying him a drink. While he was out, Ryan inserted the receiver, and set up the post-hypnotic suggestion. The hit and run accident was the first attempt, a sort of trial run. McCoy escaped, but Chekov acted as he was supposed to, so Ryan shipped aboard the Enterprise to finish the job.

While he's talking, McCoy is looking at him sort of puzzled. Then he says,

"But why? I don't know you, I've never seen you before in my life, as far as I can remember. Why do you want to kill me?"

"I'll just let you worry about that," says Ryan. "I know what happens now. You'll have to hand me over to the civil authorities for trial. I plead guilty, have a couple of years corrective training, then I'm out. Maybe I didn't manage to finish you off, but I'll get quite a laugh thinking about you going crazy trying to figure it out."

"Oh, no," says Kirk, and there's a very nasty gleam in his eye. "You're on a Starship, remember, and I'm the Captain. What I say here goes. You attempt to kill a man who is not only one of my officers, but also a close friend. I want the whole story, and I'm going to get it. I'm sure Mr. Scott and Mr. Chekov will be only too delighted to persuade you."

"That I will, laddie," rumbles Scotty menacingly. Chekov doesn't say anything, but he grins. I don't like that grin. Neither does Ryan apparently, because he gives in.

"All right, I'll tell you. What difference does it make to me anyway? I had no personal reason to kill you, Doctor. I'm a hired killer - I was paid for the job."

"Who paid you?" asks McCoy, deadly quiet.

Ryan ignores the question. "Yes, my client hates you very deeply, Doctor.- paid well over the going rate for the job. I've never known anyone so determined."

"I believe," Spock breaks in, calmly as ever, "that the Doctor asked you a question. I suggest that you answer. Mr. Scott appears to be getting impatient."

Ryan looks over at McCoy, grinning; he's enjoying this.

"It was a Mrs. Sarah McCoy - your ex-wife."

Spock is the only one fast enough to catch McCoy as he passes out cold.

* * *

A couple of weeks later, I'm called to the Captain's quarters again. He's alone this time.

"Sir down, Mr. Baillie. I have here a report from the police on Earth. They have investigated Ryan's allegations, and have sent me a copy of their findings to be used in evidence when we hand him over for trial. Dr. McCoy feels that as you were so closely involved, you are entitled to know the full story.

You may not know that before he joined the Enterprise, Dr. McCoy's marriage broke up. The details do not matter, but it seems that his ex-wife, who from all accounts tended to be neurotic, blamed him for the divorce. As she grew more and more disturbed, her hatred of McCoy grew, until at last her desire to be revenged on him became an obsession, and she employed Ryan, with the results we know. The failure of her plan has driven her beyond sanity, and she is now receiving the appropriate treatment; it's too early to say with what result."

"I'm sorry," I tell him. "The Doctor must be feeling pretty bad about it."

"Well, he is a doctor, so he's more used than any of us to coping with the actions of a sick mind. I believe he'll get over it."

"I'm glad of that, Captain; he's a very special guy."

Kirk smiles. "I think so too. Well, I must thank you for your assistance, Mr. Baillie. I know I can rely on your discretion."

"Of course," I say. "By the way, how's Mr. Chekov?"

Completely back to normal, I'm happy to say. However, I think he'll be more careful who he drinks with in future."

So that's how it ended. Next time I see Pav Chekov, he's his usual sunny self. McCoy's back to normal too, just as sarcastic as ever. So there's only one thing I want to know, and it sure keeps bugging me.

Just how the HELL did Scotty manage to smuggle that bottle of Saurian brandy under my nose?

DOCTOR'S WISH

To see you live;
To see you laugh,
To see you feel.....
.....and be like other men.

To understand you better if I can,
To be your friend.....
.....before my end.

Gladys Oliver

+++++

Chapel: How did you break your arm?

Uhura: Following McCoy's prescription.

Chapel: How could you break your arm doing that?

Uhura: The prescription fell down the Jeffries Tube - and I followed it.

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THE CLEANSING FIRE by Security Officer Baillie

Did you ever see that old motto that people used to stick up in offices and such places way back?

"You don't HAVE to be crazy to work here - but it helps."

Well, there are times when I reckon that whoever wrote that must have known about the Enterprise. Think about it - weeks of nice, normal, peaceful routine, then suddenly everybody's rushing around in a frenzy of activity and sheer heart-stopping terror. So why do I stick around? I guess because I'm crazy too.

Take our visit to Tessra, for instance. At the time, I swore blind that if I ever got off that planet, I'd quit Starfleet so fast even Scotty couldn't build an engine to catch me.

It all starts out as a routine planet survey - but then, doesn't it always? Spock's running the show because McCoy's hauled the Captain off to sickbay - he picked up a bad case of fever on our last call, and it's not responding to treatment. Our tame witch-doctor's just about running himself into the ground trying to come up with a cure.

Nobody gets too excited when orders come from Starfleet Command to survey Tessra, even though the Prime Directive is in operation; it's the sort of mission we've done a hundred times before with no problems.

It doesn't even matter too much when Scotty reports a transporter malfunction which he reckons will take quite a while to fix. Rather than hang around, Spock decides to use the shuttlecraft to take a landing party down to complete the survey. He goes himself, of course, taking Sulu, a geologist, and a couple of security guards, me and a bloke called Danvers.

I'm helping Sulu when it blows up on us; we're quite a distance away from the rest of the survey party when an alarm call comes from Danvers, who's working with Spock and the geologist. Sulu and I drop everything, and head back to where we left the others. Not being too sure what's happened, we approach quietly, and take a look from hiding. It's lucky we do, because what we see is pretty bad. Danvers and the geologist are dead, no question about that, and at first I think that Spock is too, until I see him move, and realise he's only been knocked out. Standing over the bodies are about a dozen Tessrans, and they don't look any too friendly. I don't see any firearms, but they're all armed with efficient-looking swords and spears. Sulu has his translator on, and we can make out what they're saying. The leader, who has been bending over Spock, turns to the others.

"Bind the demon securely, and watch him closely. We must return at once to the temple - the High Priest must be told of this."

A couple of the men lead up some animals that I suppose you'd call horses if you weren't too fussy, and Spock is tied on to one; he looks dazed, but he's trying to pull himself together. The others mount up, and they head off East. As they move off Sulu leaps up, and I have to pull him down again.

"Just what do you think you're doing?" I ask him.

"They've got Mr. Spock - we can't let them take him."

"Listen, Sulu, remember the Prime Directive is in operation here. It's bad enough already, but if we go charging in, there'll really be trouble. Nobody's going to leave Mr. Spock, but we've got to think things out first."

Luckily, the Tessrans haven't spotted the Galileo concealed among the rocks, so Sulu and I take the bodies on board, and try to work out the best plan of action. The first thing is to find out where Spock is, so Sulu calibrates the sensors for Vulcan life readings, and we manage to track him. After a couple of hours we've got a fix on him - wherever the Tessrans were heading, they're there; presumably in the 'temple' the leader spoke of. In the meantime, I've called up Scotty, and filled him in on what's happening.

He wants us back on board, so we prepare to take off; I tell him that on the way back I'll fly over the co-ordinates we now have for Mr. Spock, and try to get some idea of the general layout. The sensors should give us a good picture of the terrain, and we can fly high enough not to be seen from the ground.

That done, we return to the Enterprise. The bodies are taken to sickbay, and Sulu and I are called to the briefing room.

It seems weird to be sitting there without either the Captain or Mr. Spock in charge. Apart from Sulu and me, there's only Scotty and Dr. McCoy.

"Right," says Scotty. "What happened - and how did it happen?"

I tell him, with as much detail as I know. "Don't ask me how it happened," I end up. "Danvers was security watch on Mr. Spock. He's paid for his mistake, poor devil."

"The trouble is," says Scotty, "that Mr. Spock may pay as well. Doctor, what's the Captain's condition? Is he in a fit state to be told what's happened?"

"Absolutely not," says McCoy firmly. "You know what he's like - if he gets wind of this, he'll try to take over, and it'll finish him. We've got to handle this ourselves."

"The transporter's still out," Scotty says distractedly, "so we can't snatch Spock that way; the Prime Directive forbids a rescue party. We can't leave him there, yet we can't go in and get him, so what the hell do we do?"

"We can't send a landing party," I say slowly, "but we could send a couple of men down in native clothes to take a look at the situation on the ground. I'd be glad to go myself - I might be able to contact Mr. Spock, and he may have some ideas himself."

"It does seem to be a possibility, Mr. Baillie," Scotty nods. "Let's see what information the shuttlecraft picked up."

The film projected onto the briefing room screen shows what appears to be a fairly large city; its most distinguishing feature is a large, flat-topped pyramid set in an open space in the shadow of a towering cliff.

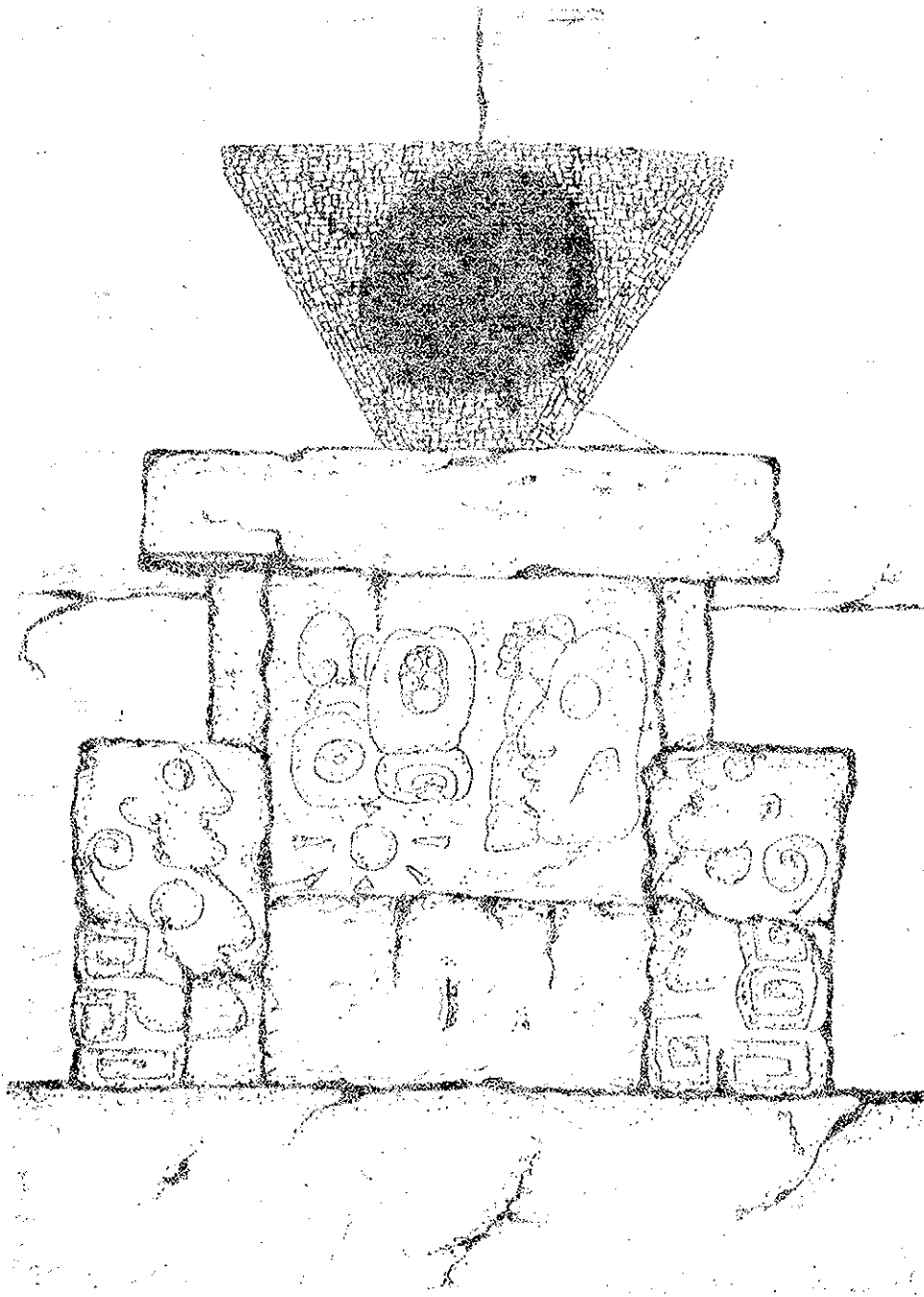
"The life readings place Mr. Spock within the pyramid," says Scotty. "Presumably this is the 'temple' the Tessran leader spoke of; that, and the reference to a 'High Priest' seems to indicate some sort of religious authority. Taking that into account, I don't like the fact that they called Spock a 'demon'; he could be in really bad trouble."

"It's those ears of his!" snorts McCoy, but you can tell he's worried too. "Scotty, we should do something soon - the longer we leave it, the worse trouble he could be in."

We fix it up that Sulu and I will take the shuttlecraft and return to the surface. Disguised as Tessrans, we'll try to get into the temple and contact Spock. Scotty gives me a miniature communicator in case I get a chance to smuggle it to the Vulcan; it won't reach the Enterprise, but I'll be able to pick it up on my own communicator. It's not much, but it's the best we can do for the moment.

We land the shuttlecraft as close to the city as we dare, and conceal it as well as possible among the rocks, then we set out on the hike to the temple. Seems as if the entire population have the same idea, because we soon meet up with crowds of Tessrans all heading in the same direction. Our disguises pass muster, and it turns out to be a lucky break, because we're soon lost in the crowd.

On this level we get a better idea of the layout of the city. The pyramid temple stands alone, backed by the towering cliff that rises behind it, and an open space in front, bounded by a line of marker posts, and forming a triangle with a curved base; beyond this boundary the streets radiate out, so that the city forms a semi-circle with the cliffs as the diameter, and the temple at the centre.



At last we pass through the open gates of the temple, and come into a vast hall which takes up most of the ground floor of the pyramid. On the rear wall is an intricate mosaic picture, which I recognise as a stylised sun disc set in a triangle. In front of this is a raised platform, on which stands an altar and a carved throne. Just as Sulu and I come through the gate, the notes of a gong echo round the hall, and the Tessrans fall to their knees as if they'd been slugged; not wanting to be conspicuous, Sulu and I go along with the crowd. Out of the corner of my eye I can see some movement taking place on the dais, but I wait until everyone else stands up before I risk taking a look. There are now about half a dozen of the guards we'd already seen, and the throne is occupied by an elderly man I take to be the High Priest. At first I don't see Spock, then the woman in front of me moves aside, and he's there. At the edge of the platform is a post, and he's chained to it by a metal collar round his throat. His hands are bound behind him, but he doesn't seem to be hurt.

"Draw nearer, Children of the Sun," says the old priest, "and look upon the demon who has been sent to trouble us."

There's a general movement towards the platform, so Sulu and I take advantage of the confusion to work our way nearer to Spock; soon I could reach out and touch him.

"Find me a diversion," I tell Sulu. "Preferably something noisy." He nods, and slips off through the crowd, just as I manage to catch Spock's eye. Trust old stone-face - he doesn't bat an eyelid, but he knows I'm there, he's recognised me.

The High Priest has risen from the throne and moved forward.

"My children, we have questioned the demon, but he will not reveal his purpose here. Never in history has such a one appeared to us, though the teachings of our ancestors have prepared us to deal with the evil he brings. The passage into our world has weakened his power, and by the grace of Hedra, we have been able to chain him."

At this point everyone bows in the direction of the altar, and it's pretty clear even to me that the Tessrans are sun worshippers, and Hedra is the incarnation of the sun. The priest goes on.

"We know that the power of the demon will be weakened for three days, therefore at sunrise on the third day he must pass to judgement. We ourselves dare not deal with one so great in evil; he will pass through the cleansing fire to Hedra, who will judge him in his own realm. Do not fear, he can do no harm. Go now, my people, and return at sunrise on the third day, when the fire will be lit, and this evil will pass from our midst."

As his words sink in, I realise just how much trouble we've bought this time; if I've picked up all this talk of fires correctly, the High Priest means to have Spock burned alive.

I'm just wondering where Sulu's got to when I hear a terrific crash from the temple entrance; somehow I manage not to look round, but take advantage of the confusion to move even closer to Spock, whose eyes are still on my face.

"Have you been searched?" I whisper, hoping he can hear me. He can, because he nods, then shakes his head when I ask, "Are you chained all the time?"

Thankfully I reach out and drop the communicator into his boot. "I'll be nearby," I tell him. "Contact me when you can."

I'm about to turn away, but his eyes hold me. "How is the Captain?"

His face and voice give nothing away, but I know him better than I did, and I can see how worried he is.

"The Captain's fine," I assure him. "Dr. McCoy is taking good care of him - he'll probably be up and about by the time we get back."

So O.K., it's a lie, but I wasn't going to add to his troubles. I grin, then lose myself in the crowd. Now I've got to locate Sulu, and get out of there. As I get near the entrance, I spot him making his way towards me. At the same time, I see his 'diversion'; he's used his phaser to cut through the hinges of the gate, and the crash of its falling gave me the time I needed.

"Lucky nobody spotted your phaser beam," I mutter.

"No chance. I made my way to the back of the crowd, and they were all too interested in the 'demon' to notice me."

"Good. Come on, we've got to find somewhere to hole up until Mr. Spock makes contact."

It's no use going into the city, and we can't get too far away because of the limited range of the communicator, so we decide to try the cliffs behind the temple. There don't seem to be any guards rushing about, so it's obvious the Tessrans don't expect anyone to come screaming in demanding their demon back.

Sulu's performance with the gate hasn't caused a panic either, so I reckon they've assumed it was some sort of accident.

As we pass behind the temple, Sulu spots a cave not too far up the cliff face which makes a good hiding place, so we settle down to wait. There's no word from Spock for a couple of hours, and I'm starting to get restless, when my communicator bleeps.

"Baillie here," I acknowledge.

"Good evening, Mr. Baillie. I trust that you are safely concealed?"

Just once, I'd like to see that man get really agitated about something.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Spock. Sulu and I are in a cave behind the temple."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Sulu. I take it he was responsible for the diversion?" Honestly, social chit-chat at a time like this!

"What's your position, Mr. Spock?"

"I am at present confined in a cell just under the roof of the temple. There are guards outside, but I am not under constant supervision."

"How about windows? Any way out there?"

"Negative, Mr. Baillie. The opening is too small."

"Could we get to you from inside the temple?"

"I think not. The upper part of the temple is restricted to the guards and priests; you would be questioned almost at once."

None of this sounds any too helpful, but I persevere. "Have you been told what they intend to do with you?"

"Yes, the High Priest was most explicit. The...execution...will take place on the temple roof. I will be chained to the pyre at sunset, and the fire will be lit at dawn."

His voice is as dispassionate as ever; you'd never believe he's talking about his own agonising death.

"Listen, Mr. Spock," I tell him. "To be honest, I haven't the faintest idea how to get you out. As soon as it's dark, I'll try and reach the temple roof - I may get some inspiration once I've seen the layout."

"Someone is coming," he says hurriedly. "Spock out."

I put away the communicator, and take a look at the temple; the sides of the pyramid are stepped, and I reckon I'll be able to climb it - I used to do a bit of rock climbing once.

As soon as dusk has fallen, I start the climb; no point in hanging about. I've got the beginnings of an idea, but I'll need to check out the roof before I go any further. It's a stiff climb, but not impossible, and at last I crawl over the low parapet onto the flat roof. Trying to get my breath back, I take a look round. The site of the execution is obvious enough; in the centre of the roof is a high platform which I judge can be clearly seen from ground level; on the platform the wood for the pyre is already in position, with the metal stake rising from the centre. There's a small altar on the platform, and I'm betting Spock's life and mine that the High Priest will light the fire from that spot. I can see that a man bound to the stake would be well above the head of anyone standing on the platform. All at once my idea seems possible. I make the return trip to the cave, where Sulu is waiting anxiously.

"I think I've got it, Sulu. Any word from Mr. Spock?"

"Nothing, Mr. Baillie. I hope he's all right."

I trigger the call signal on the communicator; Scotty's rigged it so that the note is too high-pitched for Human (and, we hope, Tesseran) ears, but audible to Vulcans. There's no reply at first, then at last,

"Spock here."

"Thank heaven! I think I've found the way out, Mr. Spock; Sulu and I are going back to the ship for some equipment - don't worry if you can't reach me for a bit. I'll contact you again before we make the snatch."

"Thank you, Mr. Baillie. Please do not take any unnecessary risks on my behalf. Spock out."

To tell the truth, I'm a bit worried by this exchange. Spock is never exactly bubbling over with enthusiasm, but his voice sounds strange - even more than usually flat, and stilted. Still, the only thing I can do for him is get back to the Enterprise and start things moving, so Sulu and I head off back to the Galileo.

Once more it's just the four of us gathered in the briefing room. McCoy looks distinctly edgy as he comes in, and says to Scotty,

"Jim's beginning to suspect that something's wrong - he's come round a couple of times and asked for Spock; I don't know how much longer I can stall him."

Scotty turns to me. "Any progress, Mr. Baillie?"

I explain the situation to him, then go on, "As I see it, the best solution would be to rescue Mr. Spock without the Tessrans realising he's gone. They get rid of their demon, we get Spock back, and we don't upset Starfleet Command by violating the Prime Directive."

"And how do we accomplish that little miracle?" snorts McCoy.

"That's up to Mr. Scott. At sunset tomorrow, Mr. Spock will be taken from his cell to the temple roof, and chained to the stake. He will remain there until dawn. That's when we make the snatch - during the night. Mr. Scott, do you have enough time to construct a robot duplicate of Mr. Spock? It won't need to be elaborate, as long as it looks like him and has the ability to move."

"I get the picture," Scotty says excitedly. "Yes, it can be done."

"Well, I don't get it," grumbles McCoy. "What's the idea?"

"The idea is that I climb the pyramid during the night, release Mr. Spock, replace him with the robot duplicate, and we head back to the shuttlecraft. It's full of holes, I know, and it's a terrific gamble, but I don't see any other way. From what I've seen of the arrangements, the Tessrans won't get close enough to detect the substitution; once the execution is over, it should be easy."

"Well, laddie, it's the best chance we're likely to get; I'll away to Engineering and see what I can do about the robot. Bones, you'd best get back to sickbay and keep an eye on Jim - we don't want him getting wind of this."

For the next few hours I feel pretty useless; I try to grab some sleep, but it's no good - I keep going over things in my mind, trying to plan ahead for any snags that might crop up. There are so many I nearly scrap the whole thing right away, but it's the best we've got to work with. At long last Scotty calls me back to the briefing room; he's beaming like a proud father, and with good reason - the robot is as near perfect as I ever saw.

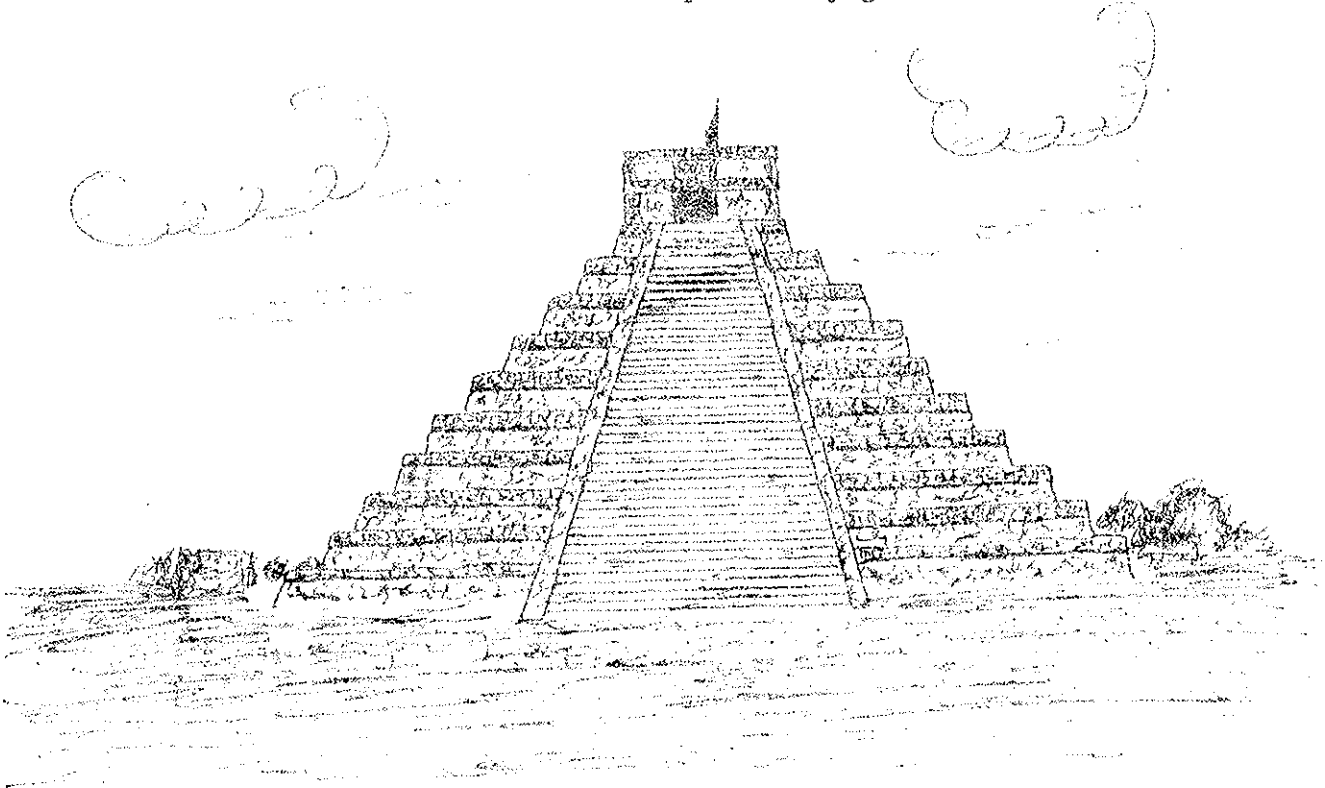
"Chekov spoke to it in the corridor," he says smugly, "and didn't spot it until I told him. It won't be able to do much, but I've programmed it to react to the flames; it should fool the Tessrans. I think it would be better, though, if I beam it down to you once you're on the roof. The transporter's all right for equipment now, and it'll save you having to control it on the way in to the city."

"Thanks, Mr. Scott. I'll keep in contact."

I winkle Sulu out of the rec room where he's busy chatting up one of the new nurses, and we're back into action. On the way down to the surface, we fix it up

that this time he'll stay with the Galileo while I go and get Spock; it's taking too much of a chance leaving the shuttlecraft unguarded so near the city.

By this time, I could find my way back to the cave blindfolded. The Tessrans are not a nosy bunch, luckily, and nobody seems to have noticed my comings and goings. I tuck myself away in the cave, and try to call Mr. Spock to let him know I'm back on the job, but there's no answer. I tell myself not to worry, there are probably guards around and he can't use the communicator. I'm sure he'll find a way to let me know if there has been any change in the plans for him. Sure enough, just about sunset I make out some activity on the temple roof. I don't want to blow the whole deal by being spotted now, so I keep a discreet eye on things from cover. It seems somebody up there likes me, because when they've finished I can see that Spock is alone on the roof - the Tessrans haven't posted any guards.



As soon as it's dark enough, I make with the mountaineering bit again. There's enough light for me to see where I'm going, but not enough to make me easily seen from the ground. I'm just congratulating myself on how well things are going when I reach the pyre and get a good look at Spock. That's when I start reciting a list of the unpleasant things that should happen to idiots like me who join Starfleet Security. They've given him a real working over; the state he's in, I wonder that he's still conscious, but he lifts his head as he hears me.

"Good evening, Mr. Baillie. I am pleased to see you."

His usual unflappable greeting; but his voice is a mere whisper. He's been horribly flogged; some of the lashes have landed on his face, which is badly cut and swollen, and his lips are bleeding. When I release the collar from his throat I have to catch him as his dead weight falls against me. He's never going to manage the climb down from the roof, so I lay him down, move out of earshot, and call up Scotty.

"There's been a change of plan," I tell him. "I'm going to need some extra equipment."

"What's the problem, Mr. Baillie?"

"Mr. Spock has been hurt. We're not going to make it back to the Galileo tonight, we'll have to hide out in the cave."

"What do you need?"

"Ask Dr. McCoy to send me a medical kit - I'd better give Spock a sedative before I try to get him away; in fact I'd be happier if he was totally out - he's in pretty bad shape. I'll need some rope as well, and when we get back to the cave we could use some food and water."

"Right. That's a medical kit and rope now, food and water when you give me the co-ordinates for the cave. Stand by, I'm sending the robot down."

A couple of minutes later the shimmer of the transporter effect signals the arrival of the robot. First thing is to do something for Spock, so I fetch the medical kit. Bones has labelled the hypo, so I give him a shot, and he passes out. Then I reckon I'd better get the robot in position just in case anybody gets nosy, so I ease off Spock's torn shirt, and put it on the robot. It still doesn't look right, so to complete the picture I smear some of his blood on its face. When I get it locked into position on the pyre it looks convincing enough to me; I can only hope it does to the Tesserans.

Now I've got the job of getting Spock back to the cave. There's no other way, I'll have to carry him, so I get him over my shoulder in a fireman's lift and tie him to me as securely as I can manage. I take a last look round; everything looks much the way I found it; so I reckon I'd better get out of there.

The climb down is hellishly difficult - Spock's no featherweight, and I don't have much freedom of movement; at the same time I'm trying not to move too abruptly as I can't tell how badly he's hurt, and I don't want to make things worse. A couple of times I think we've had it, but we get down in one piece. The climb up to the cave is no picnic either, but eventually I stagger inside and lay Spock down. I make him as comfortable as I can, and do my best to clean up his injuries; he looks pretty bad to me, but what do I know? It's one time I could really do with McCoy here.

When I've done the best I can for him, I get back on to Scotty.

"Enterprise - Scott here. What's happening, Mr. Baillie?"

"I've made it back to the cave, and done what I can for Spock. Any chance of the transporter working soon?"

"Negative. It's going to take some time yet."

"Oh, damn! Well, I suppose there's no help for it, we'll have to stay here today and hope Mr. Spock is fit enough to make the Galileo after dark. Will you let Sulu know - he'll be wondering where we are."

"Will do, Mr. Baillie. I've got your co-ordinates now, and I'll have some supplies beamed down to you. Oh, Dr. McCoy's here - he wants a word."

"Baillie? How's Mr. Spock now?"

"Asleep, Doctor. He looks bad to me."

"Well, listen. I'm sending you some more medical supplies. Give him something to eat, then keep him asleep for the rest of the day. Just before you set out for the Galileo, inject him with the second hypo - it's labelled. It's a stimulant to keep him on his feet, but don't use it until you're ready to leave. Call me at once if there's any change in his condition. Good luck."

"Thanks, Doctor. Baillie out."

As I put away the communicator the supplies are beamed down, so I investigate, as I'm getting somewhat hungry by this time. It's fairly standard stuff, but then comes a well-wrapped parcel, and I get the shock of my life. Scotty has actually parted with a bottle of his illicit alcohol; real, honest-to-goodness Scotch, no less, which he usually guards like he does his engines. Making a mental note not to say anything nasty about him for at least three weeks, I pour myself a drink. Just as I down it Spock comes to, so I take him over some food and water - no use offering him any Scotch. "Vulcans do not..." - you know how he goes on. Give him

his due, he makes a damn good job of hiding his pain as I help him sit up and give him the water.

"I owe you my life, Mr. Baillie. Thank you."

"My pleasure, sir," I grin. "Hey, it's nearly dawn - I'd better take a look and see if we've got away with it."

Stubborn as a mule, that man; he climbs to his feet and moves to the cave entrance with me. We've timed it just right, the Tessrans are already arriving on the roof. My heart's really in my mouth as they gather round the pyre, but nobody seems to notice anything different about the chained figure. There's a fair bit of chanting and moving around, then the High Priest takes a torch and sets light to the pyre. As the flames rise, the robot reacts according to Scotty's programming, and it's so realistic I break out in a cold sweat, realising how easily it could have been Spock up there.

"Well, Mr. Spock," I tell him, "it's not everyone who gets a grandstand seat at his own execution."

"Believe me, it is an experience I do not wish to repeat," he says. "Now, I believe I would like to sit down."

I help him back inside, and give him some more water.

"How did it happen?" I ask as I rebandage the still bleeding scars on his chest and arms.

"The High Priest believed that I could be persuaded to reveal my purpose here. He persisted in the belief that I am some sort of demon, and that pain would so weaken my thinking that I would tell him what he wanted to know. That is why I was unable to reply to your last signal - I could not reach the communicator."

He's very white when I finish bandaging him, and ease him back against the cave wall. I'm still wishing McCoy was here, but in the absence of our pet witch-doctor, I give him another shot with the hypo. As soon as he's safely out I pour myself another drink from Scotty's bottle, and settle down to pass the day. From time to time I take a look outside, but everything stays peaceful.

As darkness falls I waken Spock, and take him his share of the remaining food and water. He eats carefully, in total control of his actions, yet I know he must still be in great pain; and somehow we've to cover several miles of rough country before morning. When we've finished eating, I give him the Tessran clothes I've had sent down for him, and the hooded cloak which completes the disguise, because if anyone spots those ears, it's all up with us. He gets edgy when I take out the stimulant from the medical kit.

"I am perfectly all right, Mr. Baillie," he says stiffly. "I have no need of any of Dr. McCoy's drugs."

"Sorry, sir, orders," I tell him, and move over to give him the shot; in his normal state he could stop me easily, and it's a sign of how bad he is when he submits without further protest.

"Come on, sir, time we were going."

I take a last look round to make sure we haven't left any evidence of our stay, then we begin the climb down. He's very slow and unsteady, unlike his usual swift and precise movements, but we make it safely to the ground and set off through the city. There are plenty of Tessrans about; looks like they've been celebrating the destruction of the 'demon', because most of them are drunk. It's a lucky break for us, as Spock's hesitant step could be put down to intoxication if anybody is watching. We're just passing a particularly merry group when he stumbles, and only my arm round him saves him from falling. Normally I'd never dare touch him, knowing how he hates it, but this is an emergency. As I expect, he stiffens at my touch, but I guess he realises he needs help, because he leans on my arm for a moment before he pulls away and we go on.

At last we're out into the darkness of the countryside, but if the danger from the city lights has passed, we now have to contend with the rough going. I think he's too far gone to notice as he accepts my help again; I can feel how the strain is telling on him - it's sheer will-power that keeps him on his feet now, and I've no medication left to give him. Somehow we struggle on, making the best time we can. If dawn catches us in the open, I guess we've had it.

When I'm sure we're near the Galileo, I give Sulu a ball, and he's the most welcome sight I've seen in a long time when he appears out of the darkness, and gives me a hand to get the by now only half-conscious Spock aboard. As soon as we've cleared with Scotty, we head off back to the Enterprise.

The short rest on the return flight seems to have perked Spock up a bit, because he manages to leave the Galileo on his own two feet. McCoy's waiting, diagnostic scanner in hand, looking as if someone's just done him a personal injury. He takes readings from Spock, and his expression is one of deep concern.

"I'm sorry, Spock," he says slowly, and considering the way he normally talks to the Vulcan, the gentleness of his voice really surprises me. "Do you think you can hold out a bit longer? Jim's been asking for you, and if he sees you in this state, it'd worry him; he's not fit to take over yet, but he'll insist on it if he thinks you're out of action. I hate to ask you, but..."

"I shall be all right, Doctor," interrupts Spock. "I think, however, that we should not delay - I cannot maintain control much longer."

We all troop after him to sickbay, McCoy fluttering round him like an anxious hen; poor old blue-eyes really has his hands full this time with both of them out of action.

The Captain's eyes are fixed on the door as we go in, and the relief on his face is plain to see. "Spock! Are you all right?"

"Of course, Captain. It was a normal, routine planet survey, successfully completed. Dr. McCoy tells me that you have been unnecessarily concerned because we were unfortunately out of contact for some time."

"But your face?"

"This?" The hand he raises to touch his cheek is as steady as a rock. "An unfortunate accident - I carelessly stepped on some loose stones, and suffered a minor fall. As you can see, the damage is not severe. Now I suggest that you follow Dr. McCoy's advice, and get some sleep."

While he's talking I can see from where I'm standing that only McCoy's grip on his arm is keeping Spock on his feet. As soon as Nurse Chapel has given the Captain a shot, he folds to the floor like a rag doll. I help McCoy lift him on to the next bed.

"Out!" he orders me. "I've got a sickbay to run, and Mr. Scott wants to see you."

Sulu and I head off to the briefing room, where Scotty is waiting impatiently. We bring him up to date, and he relaxes visibly when he realises we're all back safely. By the time we're through, I'm about asleep on my feet, so I head off to my quarters, pausing at the door to say,

"By the way, thanks for the Scotch."

"I thought you could be doing with it, laddie - but don't look for any more."

In a few days things are back to what passes for normal on the Enterprise. Kirk's over his fever and back in command; Spock, with his Vulcan powers of healing, is back on duty quicker than I'd have expected. The Captain is madder than fire when he finds out how we tricked him, but with his usual incontestable

logic Spock points out that killing himself trying to help wouldn't've done anybody any good.

As soon as they're sitting up and taking notice, the Captain and Mr. Spock call me in to thank me for what I've done. I carefully refrain from pointing out that as senior security officer of the landing party, I'd've been up to my neck if there'd been an inquiry into the loss of our first officer; and accept their thanks with becoming modesty. As it happens, I've done myself a bit of good, because Kirk tells me he's decided to make me up to security chief - a nice little bonus. I make myself a promise, though; if that blasted Vulcan does another planet survey where the Prime Directive is in operation, I'm going along as his personal bodyguard. I might get my head blown off, but even that would be preferable to going through another situation like Tessra.

Like I said at the start -

"You don't have to be crazy to work here - but it sure helps!"

CAVEAT SCRIPTOR!

"Are you related to Dr. B?"
 I asked the Vulcan, politely,
 "Or do you find child-care a bore,
 Unlike that other Spock of yore,
 And cannot feel the slightest zest
 For toilet-training and the rest?"
 The Vulcan shook his haughty head
 And distantly and coldly said
 "Despite the fact we share a name
 Mine is a different claim to fame -
 I combine curiosity
 With rarified verbosity
 And carelessness provokes my ire
 And stirs up long-forgotten fire,
 So those who call me Dr. Spock
 May meet with an unpleasant shock.
 And now, excuse my abruptness -
 I promised Jim a game of chess."
 And off he went, and left me there
 With thudding heart, and frightened stare,
 Aware I'd been within an inch
 Of getting the Vulcan neck pinch!

Caroline Nixon.

"Oh, Sarek, come here," cried Amanda,
 There's a live fur rug on the veranda...
 You say it's a schlat?
 It's more like a door-mat
 That somehow got crossed with a panda."

* * *

Said Spock, as he hid from Nurse Chapel
 "I've heard people say that an apple
 When eaten each day
 Keeps the doctor away -
 I wish it would work with Nurse Chapel."

HIDE AND SEEK by Security Chief Baillie

Of all the officers of the Enterprise, I suppose the one who comes closest to being what I'd call a friend is Scotty. To quote our favourite Vulcan, it's logical. On any ship, the demands of discipline mean that the Captain must maintain a degree of formality with the crew, and although James T. is as nice a guy as you could wish to meet, somehow you can never forget he's the Captain. Same with Mr. Spock; and anyway, can you imagine him unbending enough to be matey with anyone? As for Dr. McCoy, well I always get the feeling he's just waiting for the chance to stick a scalpel in me - but then, all doctors affect me like that.

With Scotty it's different. He came up the hard way, through the ranks, and he's never forgotten it. We have this friendly private war going - he keeps trying to smuggle extra alcohol on board, and I'm always trying to catch him at it. At the moment, the honours are just about even. On shore leave we can both relax and enjoy an evening's drinking in the right spots. I'll freely confess he can drink me under the table any time, and be none the worse for it; I've never managed to get the better of him yet, but it's fun trying.

I suppose that's why I take such a personal interest in what happens when we put in for shore leave on Sentas. This is a favourite place with Starfleet crews; it's one of the open planets of the galaxy, and all races, including the Klingons and the Romulans, use it; as a result, the nightlife tends to be somewhat uninhibited, and our boys take enthusiastic advantage of that fact; Scotty more so than most.

Now you know by now how Scotty operates. Out in space he practically lives in Engineering - he eats, breathes and dreams the Enterprise and all its functions. Once his leave comes up, he really cuts loose, and makes his presence felt in all the bars, brothels and nightclubs for miles around. As soon as his leave's up, though, he's impatient to get back to his beloved engines.

So when I answer a call to the briefing room and the Captain tells me that Scotty has not returned to the ship, I'm really puzzled.

"You know him pretty well, Chief Baillie, did he say anything to you that might give us a lead?"

"No, sir, but there was one unusual thing; Mr. Scott and I usually have a night out together during shore leave, but this time he didn't turn up. You know how it is, I thought he'd met a girl he wanted to keep to himself, so it didn't bother me." Spock comes in at this point, and the Captain turns to him.

"Any news?"

"No, sir. Mr. Scott is not in any of the hospitals on Sentas, and Planetary Security have no record of him being arrested. I asked Dr. McCoy to check his quarters, and he tells me that he has taken most of his clothes and personal items. I am afraid it seems as though Mr. Scott's disappearance was intentional."

"I find that very hard to believe. Mr. Baillie, I want you to make a thorough investigation. I can find an excuse to keep the Enterprise here for a few more days; you have full authority to make whatever enquiries you think necessary. One restriction though; I don't want to list Scotty as a deserter - I'm sure there's some explanation for his behaviour, and I don't want him to have to face charges. Mr. Spock, I've taped a supplement to the log, extending his leave."

Spock raises an eyebrow, and I expect him to object to this highly unorthodox action, but he merely says tranquilly, "If you will let me have the tape, Captain, I will patch it in to the main log. The alteration will not be detectable, and it will be safer in case questions are asked later."

"Thank you, Spock," says the Captain, and the Vulcan nods gravely and

leaves. Kirk turns back to me.

"Get on it right away, will you, Chief? I've got a feeling about this - Scotty's in trouble."

I decide to start my investigation in Scotty's quarters. McCoy's already searched there, but he doesn't really know what to look for - I'm hoping to find something he's missed. For a time there's nothing. Scotty has really cleaned the place out, and it sure looks like he doesn't intend to come back. Then I find an address he's jotted down on a notepad - no name, but the address is in the spaceport area of Sentas. It'll bear checking, so I take it along. Then, in a box in Scotty's bedside cabinet I find about a dozen empty medicine bottles. From the labels, they once held the tablets McCoy dishes out for headaches, and other such minor complaints. He's usually very reluctant to hand out his precious pills, so I wonder how Scotty managed to get so many without the good doctor screaming from here to Vulcan. Looks like the next step's sickbay, so I head off that way.

McCoy is as taken aback as I am at the number of bottles. "I did give him some of these a couple of weeks ago," he says, "but certainly nothing like this number. Wait here, I'll check."

When he comes back he's looking grim. "He's been getting these for about a month, going round the medical staff in turn. The tablets are a standard pain-killer, readily obtainable anywhere, so no record of their issue is usually kept. But I don't understand - if he needed such massive doses, why didn't he come to me for treatment?"

"I don't know, Doctor, but I'm going to find out. I'll keep you posted."

"Do that, please, Baillie; now I'd better see about getting things tightened up around here."

So my first step hasn't really got me much further; if Scotty's ill, that could explain his absence, but Spock's already said he's not in hospital on Sentas, and he's as likely to make a mistake as I am to command Starfleet. Looks like I'll have to go down to Sentas myself, and do a bit of checking.

I find the address Scotty noted easily enough, and it turns out to be the consulting rooms of a Sentan physician, Dr. Heston. This, I think, is getting really weird; Scotty is hardly ever ill, and if he did need a doctor, surely he'd be more likely to go to McCoy, who's an old friend, rather than a complete stranger? Well, I won't get any answers staring at a closed door, so I go in; by good luck the doctor is free, and his secretary shows me in.

The offices are luxurious, elegant, and expensive; so is the doctor. When I explain the reason for my visit, he's also concerned, friendly and helpful - and I don't trust him an inch. It's just a feeling I've got; any good security man soon develops an instinct for when people are lying in their teeth, and the good doctor is putting up a virtuoso performance.

"I'm sorry I can't help you, Chief Baillie," he says. "I do vaguely recall my secretary making an appointment for a Mr. Scott, but he never showed up, and I've had no further word from him."

"Well, it was worth trying," I reply, letting him think I've swallowed his story. "If you should hear from Mr. Scott, I'd be grateful if you'd contact Security."

I decide right then that I want to know a lot more about Dr. Heston, so I go straight to the top. Chief of Security on Sentas is Dave Martin; we served together in Starfleet for a time before injuries forced him to transfer to the civilian service. He's pleased to see me when I call up and invite him out for a drink, and I don't broach the subject of Heston until I'm sure we're well away from interested ears. He sits up when I tell him what I want.

"Dr. Heston?" he says thoughtfully. "You know, I'd give ten years pay to pin something on him. He's kept his nose clean officially, but between you and me, I'm certain he's mixed up in the rackets here. There's never been anything I can prove, but he keeps some very strange company for a respectable doctor. I'm convinced he's working with the Klingons, and I do know for a fact that he's responsible for the health of the girls in the biggest chain of brothels on Sentas."

"So the Klingons come in to this," I say. "I can't see yet what the connection is, but there must be one. Look, Dave, I'm going to try something tonight, and while I'm about it I'll see what I can dig up for you."

"I'd be grateful," he admits. "Let me know if I can help out." He doesn't ask me what I intend to do, but he knows me pretty well, so I guess he reasons that what he doesn't know about officially, he can't act on.

Later that afternoon I'm sitting behind a newspaper in the entrance hall of the office block where Heston has his rooms, keeping a discreet eye open for the doctor leaving. I look up as the lift doors open, and recognise a familiar figure heading for the exit.

Think of everything you've ever heard about Klingons, double it, and you've got a rough idea of Kolmak, the Klingon security officer who's just left the building. I've run up against him a couple of times, and he's one of the nastiest pieces of work his planet has ever produced - which is saying plenty. Now, on an open planet like Sentas, it's not unusual to see a Klingon or two wandering about, but in view of what Dave Martin's just told me, a few pieces of the puzzle start slotting in to place. Just then I see Heston himself on his way out, so once I'm sure he's clear of the building, I take the lift up to his offices. The door to his waiting room presents no problems, nor does his secretary's office; the files stored there I ignore - what I want will be much more carefully hidden. Sure enough, the door to Heston's own office is much more efficiently protected than an innocent doctor would find necessary but it doesn't hold me up for too long. Heston may be all kinds of a crook, but he's a rank amateur, and I find and open his private safe without too much trouble. Seems the Klingons were so sure of his cover they didn't even bother to check his security; that's their mistake.

Most of Heston's files are no use to me, but after a quick glance I set them aside for Dave; they tie Heston into the drug racket as well as vice. The file I'm after is the one he's thoughtfully labelled 'Lt-Commander Montgomery Scott'; this I read with rapt attention, and it answers most, but not all, of my questions.

Gathering up my evidence I head back to Dave's office, and he practically offers me the key to the city when I dump my trophies on his desk; but there are only two things I want right then.

"Have Heston picked up quietly," I ask him. "I don't want word of his arrest to leak out for a while. And one other thing - have your men locate Scotty for me. I know he's still on Sentas, but he's under cover. Your boys know the set-up, and can find him a lot quicker than I can. Don't bring him in, though - I want to talk to him first."

"Consider it done," says Dave, and gives the necessary orders. While I'm waiting, I call up the Captain, and fill him in on what's been happening. When he hears about the Klingon involvement, he's all set to beam down himself but I persuade him to leave it to me.

It takes a couple of hours before one of Dave's agents reports that Scotty has been located, holed up in a seedy hotel in the less respectable quarter of the spaceport, so I head off there to finish the job.

The manager of the hotel is a rather slimy specimen who isn't too fond of Federation security men, but he's only too eager to cooperate once I've leaned on him a little. He tells me that Scotty hasn't left his room since he checked in, and shows me a bottle of whisky he's about to take up.

"I'll take it," I tell him. "And don't get any ideas about calling ahead."

Trust Scotty to hide out on the top floor of a crummy hotel with no lift. "Come!" says the familiar voice as I reach the top at last and knock on the door. I spare a glance round as I go in - the Ritz it's not, but I guess Scotty isn't too interested in the decor. He's sitting at the table, his head in his hands, gloomily surveying the corpses of the bottles he's got lined up in front of him. He doesn't even look up as I walk in, but when I just stand there saying nothing he lifts his head at last, and seems to have a bit of trouble focussing on me.

"Mr. Baillie," he says, nodding his head wisely. "I might have known. Pull up a chair, and have a drink." I think it's best to go along with him for the moment, so I do as he says.

Despite the evidence of the bottles, Scotty is stone cold sober. In his eyes there's an expression of utter desolation, and deep down, a hint of fear.

"Well now," he goes on, "and what brings you here? I thought the Enterprise would be gone by now."

"Come off it, Scotty. Can you see the Captain going anywhere without his Chief Engineer?"

"I suppose not. I haven't been thinking too clearly just lately." He reaches for the bottle again, and I can see his hand is shaking. A sudden stab of pain flashes across his face; he takes out a couple of pills, and swallows them with the whisky. After a moment his face clears. "That's better. So now what, Security Chief Baillie?"

"So now, Lt-Commander Scott, we finish the bottle." He grins, and pours us another drink. After a moment I go on. "You're in trouble, Scotty; want to talk about it?"

"Aye, why not, laddie. It'll all come out now anyway." He holds out his glass again, and I refill it - for all the effect it's having, it might as well be water. "I've got Ryton's Disease. You'll probably not have heard of it - thankfully it's very rare, but it's incurable." The fear is strong in his eyes now. "I saw a case of it once when I was in the Merchant Service - my Chief at the time - he was a good man, and a fine engineer; I've never been able to forget it. It causes complete paralysis, and eventually total sensory loss - sight, hearing, speech, everything goes; but the brain remains aware. As long as sanity holds out, a prisoner inside your own head. The Chief lasted five years, but he was a lot older than I am - I'd have longer to go. I couldn't face it, Baillie. I thought of telling Bones, but once he knew, I'd have had to resign from the service formally; all those questions, routines, all the sympathy - I just couldn't take it. Oh, I wasn't relying on my own judgement, I consulted a doctor here on Sentas, and he confirmed it. I guess I must be a bit of a coward, but I decided just to disappear from the Enterprise, have a final fling, then take the quick way out. I should've realised that someone'd come after me, but like I said, I haven't been thinking too clearly. It's too late now."

For a few minutes I can't think of anything to say. No wonder the poor guy's scared; in his shoes I'd have done much the same. I'm also feeling a bit guilty - I set out to find him with the best intentions, but it seems all I've done is to prolong his agony. Then I get to thinking about Dr. Heston, and it comes to me that there's maybe a chance after all.

"Listen, Scotty," I say earnestly. "There's a few things you should know. That Dr. Heston - besides being one of the biggest crooks on Sentas, he's a

Klingon agent. He's tied in with their security chief, Kolmak. Last night I broke in to his office and lifted his file on you. As soon as the Enterprise left Sentas, you were going to be handed over to Kolmak. You know what they'd do to get their hands on a Federation engineer. Isn't it just possible that in order to convince you to stay on Sentas, Heston faked your diagnosis?"

"It's the kind of thing you'd expect from the Klingons," admits Scotty, "but no, Baillie, I've got to face it - I had the symptoms long before we got to Sentas."

"That's just it," I break in impatiently. "You're no doctor - all you've really got to go on is your own fear. Come back to the Enterprise. See Dr. McCoy - then at least you'll know for sure, and you can decide then what you want to do."

"Aye, I could do that; if I'd been in my right mind, I'd've trusted Bones from the start. Hold on, though - I can't go back. I'm a deserter, remember."

"Oh, no, you're not," I tell him. "The Captain faked a log entry extending your leave, he was so sure there was a good reason for your absence - you can go back whenever you like."

"That's the sort of thing Jim would do; but what did Spock have to say about it?"

"Spock? Oh, Spock only patched the fake tape in to the main log to cover you in case of trouble."

"Spock did?" Scotty's eyebrows rival the First Officer's best efforts: "Well, I'll be...! Don't tell me our tame Vulcan is developing a sentimental streak."

"Oh, you know him. He'll probably tell you it would be 'illogical' to lose our Chief Engineer, or something. Mind you, there have been times when I've wondered about him."

"Me too." Scotty stands up. "Well, let's get going. Will you do the honours, Mr. Baillie?"

"My pleasure, Mr. Scott." I pull out my communicator, and signal the Enterprise; in a few minutes we're caught up in the transporter effect.

An hour later I'm sitting in the waiting room of sickbay pretending to read a magazine. Across the room Kirk has given up pretending; unconsciously he's been shredding the pages into confetti, a sure sign that he's nervous. Scotty is in sickbay with McCoy, having every test in the book run on him - plus a few that aren't if I know McCoy; and I do.

The door opens, and we both look up, but it's only Spock. I go back to my magazine, but I'm aware that the Vulcan's sharp eyes have seen the Captain's busily-working fingers. He goes over, bends down and says something that I don't catch. Jim looks up and smiles faintly; Spock touches him lightly on the shoulder for an instant, then takes the seat beside him. That's all there is to it, but the Captain's restless hands are now lying quietly in his lap.

Next time the door opens it's Nurse Chapel, who beckons us into the doctor's office. McCoy's there, beaming all over his face; and Scotty, grinning sheepishly.

"Well, Bones?" asks Kirk anxiously.

"Migraine! Plain, old-fashioned migraine! The headaches, the visual distortions - a classic case. You're allergic to something you've eaten, Scotty my lad." McCoy's voice holds its most sarcastic note, but the blue eyes are suspiciously bright. "I'm beginning to wonder what I'm doing on this ship if you're all going to start playing doctors. All you need, Scotty, are

a few chemical tests to find out what you're allergic to; cut that out, and you'll be right as rain."

"I do feel a bit of an idiot," confesses Scotty. "I'm sorry, Captain, Doctor - and thank you."

"Thank Mr. Baillie," says the Captain, turning to me. "He did all the work."

"Aye, don't I know it. Thank you, Mr. Baillie."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Scott. It's good to have you back."

"If you have all quite finished with this totally unnecessary display of emotion," says Spock, "I would remind Mr. Scott that during his absence several matters of importance have arisen, and are awaiting his attention in Engineering." And he looks totally blank when the rest of us collapse into helpless laughter.

So that just about wraps it up. McCoy's tests reveal the cause of Scotty's allergy. No, not whisky - cheese.

I hear later from Dave Martin that Heston has been put away for some considerable time, thanks to the files I lifted from his office. Kolmak has landed in all kinds of trouble, thanks to his failure to hand over Scotty as promised; the Klingons give no marks for effort.

Me - I come out of it rather well. Dave's official report gives me most of the credit for Heston's arrest; and to show his appreciation, Scotty sends me a case of genuine, ten-year-old Scotch.

In fact, apart from Heston and Kolmak, over whom I don't shed any tears, the only one to come out of the whole affair badly is that hotel manager on Sentas - somehow Scotty never did get round to paying his hotel bill.

COLOURED TRIBBLES by Nora Manning

(with apologies to the writers of 'Scarlet Ribbons'.)

I looked up and on the viewscreen
Was a heap of purring fluff
I looked up - my heart was captured
I could never see enough.
I don't care for pups or pussies
Guinea pigs are people. Why
Should I fall for gold-green tribbles
Hurtling me-wards through the sky?

If I live to be a hundred
I would sell my soul to get
Just one tribble, gold-green tribble,
Ginger tribble, for a pet.

Tho' Jim Kirk was very angry
And he's fearsome in a rage,
Tho' they'd occupied the food store
Tribbles of every size and age,
In my heart their throbs and purring
Spoke of never-ending love
Klingon-hating, Spock-preferring
Tribbles, tribbling from above.

If I live to be a hundred
I would sell my soul to get
Just one tribble, gold-green tribble,
Ginger tribble, for a pet.

CAPTAIN'S GOLD by Security Chief Baillie

I've served under quite a few Starship Captains in my time; most of them were pretty good on the whole - Starfleet doesn't go for incompetents - so I reckon I'm a fair judge. My boss now suits me just fine, and you'll hear no complaints from me if I get to finish my service under his command.

You'll have heard of him - Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise; youngest Captain in the Fleet when he was appointed. There was plenty said when he took over the Enterprise at first - a boy wonder for a Captain, and a Vulcan half-breed for a First Officer; now she's called 'the finest Starship in the Fleet', and we all know where to put the credit for that.

It's an education to watch Kirk and Spock at work - what one can't handle, the other can, and it's a standing joke in Security that as long as those two are up on the bridge, the crew will take whatever trouble comes along, and like it.

So it's like the end of the world when Starfleet Command takes a sudden rush of blood to the head, and give Spock a ship of his own. I'm on the bridge when the message comes in, so I see the reaction first-hand. I feel real sorry for Admiral Wright - she comes through with what she reckons to be good news, expecting celebrations all round, and her announcement falls flatter than a lead pancake. Spock just sits there, and if anyone tells you Vulcans can't turn pale, don't believe them - he does. The Captain looks over at Spock just once, then doesn't take his eyes off the floor for the rest of the session. As for me and the rest of the bridge crew, well, we stand or sit with our mouths open, giving a great impression of a bunch of stranded goldfish.

At last Spock finds his voice.

"Admiral," he says stiffly, "I regret I must decline. I have never sought command, nor do I desire it. I am unsuited..."

"Nonsense, Commander," says the Admiral briskly. "Your record speaks for itself - your promotion is long overdue. You are ordered to take command of the Orion at Starbase Five. I shall look forward to meeting you there."

So that's it. Spock tries, the Captain tries, but it's no use, Spock has to go. Apart from the fact that Spock is long overdue for a command of his own - Starfleet have only been waiting for a suitable ship - it seems that some busybody politician has been sticking his nose in, and decided that another Vulcan Captain would be good for public relations.

I've never known a crew get so depressed when the news sinks in. Even McCoy's in a shocking temper - as he says, who's he going to fight with now?

We reach Starbase Five, and everybody gets shore leave while we wait for the Orion. The Captain and Spock take off together like they usually do; Kirk's taking it harder than anyone, but then he's a lot closer to the Vulcan than anyone else. When we get back from leave, the Orion has joined us in orbit, and the transfer arrangements are completed.

I'm in the transporter room when he beams over; we're putting on a show for the Orion's crew, letting them know what we think of Spock, and I'm leading the Honour detail. The rest of the party have beamed over already to form a reception committee, and I'm waiting to escort Spock. There's no sign of Kyle, and I'm just beginning to wonder who's going to handle the controls when Kirk and Spock come in. It gives me a queer feeling to see them together, both wearing Captain's gold. I take my place on the transporter, and stand waiting while they talk quietly together for a few moments, then Spock holds up his hand in the Vulcan salute. Kirk copies the gesture,

and their hands touch for a moment. Spock joins me on the platform, Kirk moves to the controls, and the room dissolves in a golden shimmer.

Next thing I see is the transporter room of the Orion, and the welcoming committee. The Orion's First Officer is as nervous as hell as he makes his speech - it's not every day you get landed with a living legend as a Commanding Officer. Our own Honour Detail is well up to the mark, and it's obvious we've made a good impression.

Once the formalities are over, Spock leaves with his officers for a tour of his new command, and I head for the rec room with Bill Reynolds, the Orion's Security Chief. Over coffee I improve the shining hour by handing out a bit more information about Spock. Any crew's naturally curious about its new commander, and I know that what I tell Bill will be all over the ship in a couple of hours. I reckon it won't do the Orion mob any harm to know just what they're getting, and I quickly gather an interested audience as I fill them in. You know Spock as well as I do by now, but they've only heard Starfleet gossip, and they're glad of some first-hand information. I think some of them had never met a Vulcan before, and had been a bit unsure what to expect.

Well, after about an hour, the intercom calls me back to the transporter room. I see the Honour Detail on its way, and I'm talking to the transporter chief when Spock comes in and beckons me aside.

"I wished to bid you farewell, Mr. Baillie, and to commend you for your past services," he says. Now, that may not sound much to most people, but I know a lot more about Vulcans than I used to, and I appreciate it.

"Thank you, Captain; I've enjoyed working with you," I reply.

After a moment, he goes on. "When you return to the Enterprise, would you give this to the... to Captain Kirk," and hands me a small package.

"Certainly, sir," I tell him, and take my place on the platform. As the scene dissolves, I suddenly get the crazy notion that he looks somehow... very lonely, standing there in Captain's gold. Damn fool idea!

The scene on the Enterprise when I materialise is almost identical to the one I've just left on the Orion - the transporter chief at the controls, the Captain standing just inside the door. Kyle leaves as the transfer is completed and Kirk watches me as I come down the steps. He'll want a full report later, but I sense this is not the time; instead I hand him the package.

"From Mr. Spock, sir," I tell him.

He opens it, and stands looking at the contents for a long time, not speaking; then he holds up his hand, and dangling from his fingers is an IDIC, that Vulcan medallion Spock wears.

"I understand," he whispers, so quietly that I can hardly hear him, but he's not talking to me anyway. He fastens the chain round his neck, slipping the medallion under his shirt; for a moment he looks at me blankly, as though he's forgotten I'm there, then he gives a sort of grin, and walks out.

So that's how Spock leaves the Enterprise; things sure are different after that. Everyone feels it; McCoy's even snappier than usual, missing his favourite sparring partner; Scotty no longer has an interested audience to talk engines with; and the Captain - well, it's like he's lost his right hand. A hundred times I see him turn, ready to make some comment, then he remembers, and his hand strays automatically to his neck, as though the feel of the IDIC comforts him somehow.

We don't get a new First Officer right away - Starfleet don't want to land us with just anyone, and Spock is hard to replace. Secretly, I think we're all kind of relieved - it's going to be hard to get used to seeing someone else in Spock's place.

Then, just to prove that somebody somewhere doesn't like Captain Kirk much,

we get landed with a new assignment - a top-secret diplomatic mission to Zendi, a fairly recent member of the Federation. I get stuck with the security detail, so I'm in the briefing room when the Captain outlines the purpose of the mission.

It seems that the Kandar of Zendi, who is by way of being an absolute ruler, has sent an urgent plea for assistance to the Federation; the whole thing being so hush-hush that we're supposed to be paying a courtesy visit - the Kandar will fill us in on the details personally when we get there.

Well, we beam down nice and easy, the Captain, Dr. McCoy plus a full security team with me in charge. Our reception's real friendly, not a hint of trouble, but that goes for nothing. The Kandar comes to greet us in person, and we spend most of the day going through the diplomatic routine like nice, polite little gentlemen. In the evening they've laid on an official dinner for us, and we're expected to stay the night. The Captain accepts, but McCoy is needed back on the ship, so he leaves as the rest of us are shown to the quarters we've been assigned. As his personal guard, I've been given a room next to the Captain's; the rest of the security team is just down the hall. I warn my boys to stay alert, but we don't really know what we're looking for; neither does the Captain, as he tells me when I get the chance to have a word with him - we'll just have to wait until the Kandar feels like letting us in on the problem.

The meal passes off quietly, and when we retire for the night, everything is still peaceful, but I can't get rid of this nasty suspicious feeling that trouble's coming fast. I check with my boys, but they've got nothing to report either - it's all serene as far as they can tell, so I head back to the Captain's room. He opens the door as soon as I knock, like he's expecting me, and I can see he's real jumpy.

"Come in, Mr. Baillie," he says quietly. "We have a visitor."

As I move past him into the room I see the Kandar himself sitting on the couch. "My security chief, Mr. Baillie," Kirk introduces me. "You can speak freely in front of him, sir."

"First, I must thank you for your patience, Captain Kirk," the old man says. "I regret that even in my own palace I cannot act freely. However, I will now explain why I summoned you. Captain, this entire sector of Federation territory is in grave danger."

"Go on, sir," says the Captain.

"As you know, Zendi is an absolute monarchy - the Kandar holds supreme power. I have long felt that this situation must change; the people must be given more control. But this cannot be achieved overnight - it will require careful preparation.

My grandson Telman, who is my heir, is in agreement with my ideas; at this moment he is touring Federation planets to study their forms of government, and to learn from them. Unfortunately, his brother Ordon holds the opposite view; I recently learned that he is plotting to overthrow me and take the throne."

"Can't you move against him?" asks Kirk. "From what I know of Zendi, his following cannot be large - most of the people would support you."

The Kandar sighed. "That is true. If it were merely a rebellion by Zendans, I could contain it, but Ordon has been unexpectedly cunning. I have evidence that he has sought an alliance with the Klingons; in return for their help, he will allow them to use Zendi as a base."

Even I can see that this poses quite a problem - a Klingon base in the heart of Federation territory would give Starfleet Command nightmares for months.

"Would your people submit to this?" asks Kirk worriedly.

"If Ordon can establish himself as the legal ruler, yes, they would. The habit of obedience is strong, Captain. However, I have taken certain steps to hinder his ambition, and that is where I need your help. Have you ever heard

of the Shield of Zendi?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"It is a jewelled badge of incalculable age, and has been for generations the symbol of power on Zendi; whoever holds it will be accepted without question as ruler. It is normally kept in my apartments, but as soon as I learned of Ordon's treachery, I took the precaution of concealing it in a place only I know. I will entrust it to you, in case Ordon moves against me, as he may very well do while Telman is absent. Only after my death will he learn that the Shield is missing; without it he will be unable to command the people. You, Captain, must then retrieve the Shield, and deliver it to Telman."

"But if you are prepared for treachery, surely your guards..."

The Kandar shook his head. "Alas, I do not know who to trust; Ordon's agents have already infiltrated my guard, I am sure. No, Captain Kirk, I must rely on you."

"Well, you can trust my men," I break in. "Captain, I could assign a couple of my boys to guard the Kandar until we can deal with Ordon - and the Klingons."

"Do you agree, sir?" asks the Captain.

"Thank you, I must admit they would be most welcome; even at my age, the idea of assassination is unpleasant."

"I'll see to it, Captain," I tell him, and head for the guards' quarters.

I don't know what it is that arouses my suspicions, but even as I push open the door, I know that something's wrong. Instinctively I drop to the floor, and that's what saves my life, because the phaser beam only catches me a glancing blow; even at that, I go out like a light.

When I come to, I take a look round. Whoever attacked me has gone, but has left the evidence of his presence; all six of my boys are dead. They must have been taken completely by surprise, because they're just lying where they fell without even the time to draw their weapons. The shot I took must have addled my brains, because it's a couple of minutes before I remember the Captain; when I do I return to his room at once. I'm too late, though - when I get there, he's putting up a good fight against a bunch of palace guards. I get one of them with my phaser, then somebody jumps me from behind, and knocks it from my hand. I join in the general mayhem, but the odds are against us - a few minutes later we're both held securely by the guards. To my relief the Captain doesn't seem to be hurt, but he's plenty mad. I soon see why - the Kandar is lying by the door, very obviously dead. The poor old guy was right all along the line - he just ran out of time.

The guards snap to attention as a young man comes in, Ordon in person, as it turns out. He's looking fit to be tied, and it's pretty clear he's already discovered that the Shield of Zendi is missing.

Right behind him is an unpleasantly familiar figure - Kolmak, the Klingon Security Chief. We've had several encounters already, the last one on Sentas, where he was the brains behind an attempt to kidnap Scotty. I managed to spike his guns on that occasion, and from the look he gives me, I somehow don't think he's forgiven me.*

However, he's got bigger fish to fry at the moment, and turns at once to the Captain. "Well, Captain Kirk, and where is the Shield of Zendi?"

"The Shield of Zendi?" asks the Captain, all innocent-like.

"Let's not play games, Kirk. The Kandar has hidden the Shield, and you know where. You refuse to speak? Well, no matter; a Klingon cruiser is

* Hide and Seek, Log Entries 13.

already on its way here... I believe you already have some experience of the mind-sifter?"

Kirk turns pale at this, but shakes his head stubbornly; Kolmak sighs patiently. "After all, a few days will make no difference. Guards! Take the Captain to the cells - make sure he is well guarded." Kirk is escorted out; Ordon hesitates a moment, then follows. Kolmak turns to me.

"Now, my dear Mr. Baillie, I am sure I can rely on your common sense. You must be aware that it would be... inadvisable for the redoubtable Mr. Scott to attempt to intervene in our little... dispute. The consequences for Captain Kirk would be... most unpleasant."

He really has me there; if Scotty attempts a rescue, Kirk will be punished. I know there's not much point in trying anything at the moment, so I pull out my communicator and call the Enterprise. Scotty answers at once.

"Baillie here," I tell him. "We have a problem, Mr. Scott."

"What's wrong, laddie?"

I fill him in on the situation, then Kolmak takes over. "Be very clear, Mr. Scott - Captain Kirk is securely guarded at all times, and I think you will find that your sensors will not penetrate the palace dungeons. If you attempt to interfere, the Captain will suffer; do not, and - perhaps - we will return him to you when we have finished with him." He snaps the communicator shut before I have a chance to warn Scotty about the Klingon ship, then turns to me. "I am sure you would like to join the Captain - allow me to escort you."

As we descend deeper and deeper under the palace, my hopes are fading fast. Even if we break out of the cell, it's odds against us getting this far without being seen, and the sensors will never work this far below ground. We come at last to an open cell door; Kolmak goes in ahead of me, and I hear him laughing - I soon see why. The Captain has been fastened to the wall; as I come in, Ordon turns round, a knife still in his hand, none too pleased at the interruption.

"You are impatient, Lord Ordon," Kolmak chuckles. "However, I fear you are wasting your time - such methods will not persuade the Captain. You must restrain your enthusiasm until my ship arrives - the mind-sifter will soon unearth the information you require. After that... well, I am sure that the Captain will provide you with considerable... amusement." He gestures to one of the guards, who goes over and unfastens the chains; Kirk slips to the floor, and ignoring Kolmak I go over to him. "I must bid you farewell for the moment, Mr. Baillie. I trust you will not find your accommodation too uncomfortable. I must also apologise for the presence of the guards, but I am sure you understand." He leaves with Ordon, but I don't have time for them, or for the guards he's left sitting just inside the door - the Captain needs help. At least the guards don't interfere - they've been ordered to watch us, and that's all they do while I try to clean up the cuts on Kirk's chest and arms. There's a jug of water in the cell, but I have to use part of his shirt to clean away the blood - it's cut to ribbons anyway, so it doesn't make much difference. There's a very nasty wound just at the base of his throat - the chain around his neck seems to be cutting into it, so I try to unfasten it to make the job easier. Even in his half-conscious state that gets through to him; one hand covers the IDIC protectively, while he tries to push me away with the other. I can see I'm not getting anywhere, so I stop trying. He quietens then, and lets me get on with bathing the wounds as best I can.

He comes round after a bit, though we can't talk much because of the guards. Some time during the following day we get fed at last, and the guards are changed; they're not exactly a chatty bunch, but at least they leave us alone.

Towards evening the Captain falls into an uneasy sleep; at first I'm pleased, he must be in quite a lot of pain, but after a while he begins to toss restlessly, and I can hear him muttering in his sleep. I go over to take a look

at him, and as soon as I touch him I can see he's burning up with fever - the cuts have become inflamed, and he's in a bad way.

I try talking to the guards, but it's no use, they won't help. All I can do for him is to keep bathing his face, but it doesn't seem to help much. As the night wears on he grows even more restless, calling for Spock. After a while he seems to think the Vulcan's there with him, because he acts like he's actually talking to him, listening for an answer; I can't make out what he's saying, though, because he's speaking in Vulcan - Spock was teaching him the language before he left the Enterprise - and all the time he's hanging onto that IDIC like it gives him some sort of comfort.

In the morning Kolmak comes by to take a look at us. He's plenty mad when he sees the state Kirk's in - even the mind-sifter won't work on a corpse. He barks out a few orders, and soon one of the palace servants comes in with some ointment and bandages, also a bowl of vile-smelling liquid which he tries to make Kirk drink. The Captain fights him off, but when I try he seems to know me, and I manage to get some of it down him. I'm re-dressing his cuts when his eyes open, and he looks at me with recognition. At the other end of the room Kolmak is talking to the guards, and Kirk takes advantage of their preoccupation to whisper to me,

"How long do we have before that Klingon cruiser gets here, Mr. Baillie?"

"I make it about three days, sir," I tell him.

"Listen, it's vital for the security of the Federation that Ordon doesn't get his hands on the Shield. I know where it is, and once they use the mind-sifter, I will tell them - I won't be able to help it. You're our only chance."

"Me, sir?" I ask him, startled.

"Yes, you. If the Klingons set up a base here, they'll be a constant threat. I'm giving you a direct order, Mr. Baillie - before that ship gets here, kill me."

"Kill you, Captain? I can't."

"You must. There's too much at stake. Promise me?" His fingers are biting into my wrist, and I can't avoid his direct gaze. He's right, I know, but it's a hell of a thing to have to do.

"All right, sir, I promise," I tell him. He sighs thankfully, and leans back against the wall; in a few minutes he's asleep.

Kolmak comes over and takes a look at him. "Excellent! Our good Captain should recover sufficiently to face interrogation - and to provide our friend Ordon with a satisfactory subject for his... hobby."

He goes out, and I sit down to watch Kirk, thinking about what he's asked me to do. I can manage it, I reckon, and decide that I'll make my move at the first indication that the Klingon ship has arrived - I'm fast enough to beat the guards to him, and it'll only take a couple of seconds to break his neck. There's one comfort - he'll have a cleaner death at my hands than at Ordon's. The only thing is, I'm praying he'll still be asleep when I come to do it - I don't want to see his eyes.

Whatever that stuff was they gave the Captain, it's a powerful sedative; he sleeps on, not even wakening when the guards are changed yet again. Kolmak comes in a couple of times to check on his condition, and seems satisfied. When the servant brings our next meal, he brings some more of the medicine with him, and though I can't get the Captain to eat, I manage to persuade him to swallow some of that - until the Klingon ship arrives there's still hope, even if I do have to kill him in the end. As soon as he's swallowed the stuff he falls asleep again, and several times I hear him talking in his sleep, still apparently to Spock; but it's different this time, he's much calmer.

So the hours pass, and I'm still no nearer to finding a way out - the

guards don't take their eyes off us for a moment. I reckon this is our last night; tomorrow the Klingon ship will arrive.

I'm leaning against the wall, watching Kirk, wondering when I should make my move - for his sake, I don't dare leave it too late - when out of the corner of my eye I catch a flicker of light just behind the seated guards. By some miracle I'm awake enough to recognise it at once as the shimmer of the transporter. Someone is beaming down directly into the cell - I guess that Scotty has somehow managed to locate us, and is risking everything on a desperate attempt to rescue the Captain before the guards can reach him.

Somehow I must help - distract their attention. With a yell I leap to my feet and run for the door, clawing frantically at the small barred window in it. I don't have a hope in hell of getting out, of course, but the trick works - the guards come after me and drag me back. They're so taken up with me that the landing party has time to materialise completely unnoticed - first thing the guards know about it is when they crumple to the floor stunned by phaser beams.

"Congratulations, Mr. Baillie - a well-timed diversion,"

It's the one voice I never expected to hear. I turn round with my jaw dropping, and sure enough, it's Spock in person, accompanied by Dr. McCoy and a couple of security men.

"What the... How the hell did you get here?" I stammer. Not exactly the most respectful way to address a Starship Captain who's just saved your life, but I'm so relieved to see those pointed ears again I don't really know what I'm saying.

"Explanations later, Mr. Baillie. Secure the door," he tells the guards, then moves over to join McCoy, who's already kneeling beside Kirk. Blue-eyes looks up and grins, and I'd swear I hear Spock breathe a sigh of relief before he turns back to me, impassive as ever.

"What exactly has happened?"

I tell him as much as I know, and warn him about the Klingon ship. He snaps open his communicator. "Spock to Enterprise. The Captain is safe, Mr. Scott. Beam down the remaining security teams, and proceed as instructed. Maintain full alert status - a Klingon ship may arrive at any time. Spock out. Are you ready, Doctor?"

McCoy nods. "The sooner I get Jim to sickbay, the better."

"Very well. I will lead the security teams, and secure the palace."

"I'll go with you sir," I offer. McCoy turns at that.

"Oh no you won't. You're for sickbay too - you look almost as bad as Jim does."

To tell the truth, I've almost forgotten about the phaser shot I took, but now that he mentions it, I do feel a bit groggy, so I don't argue when Spock tells Scotty to beam the three of us up. Once on the Enterprise, McCoy hauls us both off to sickbay; I almost make it to the bed when the floor comes up and hits me.

When I eventually come round the whole mess is just about over. McCoy is standing at my bedside, and he obligingly fills me in. Kolmak and Ordon have been rounded up, and are safely in custody on Zendi; Starfleet Command has been notified of the situation, and Telman is already on his way home to take over; as for the Klingon ship, as soon as the Captain sees the game's up it takes off at warp speed. Having told me that, and added for good measure that Kirk is recovering nicely, McCoy slips me another sedative, and it's bedtime for Baillie again.

When I come to again, I can hear the murmur of voices from the next bed.

It's the Captain and Spock, and I reckon they won't want to be interrupted, so I don't let on I'm awake; but I can't help overhearing them.

"How did you know I needed you?" the Captain is asking softly. "Was it a mind link?"

"No, Jim, we were too far apart. I did try to contact you, but as I warned you, because I am only half Vulcan, I could not reach you across so great a distance."

"Then how...?"

"I am not certain. There was no direct contact, as in the link, only unease, and the increasing certainty that you needed me. I slept, to see as in a dream the IDIC I gave you, and awoke knowing that danger threatened you. I had no evidence, but I... felt... your pain and your fear... so, I came."

"I thought - in my fever - that I spoke to you, and you answered me."

"You did not - you could not; it was only delirium."

"Then how do you explain it? I was so sure our minds had linked somehow."

"I think - perhaps - it is because our minds have touched so often. There is an... awareness... between us. In your pain you clung to the IDIC - perhaps it acted as a kind of... amplifier - and somehow your great need reached me, warned me."

"Whatever the reason, you came."

"As I always will."

"Spock..."

"Well, so you're awake, are you, Jim? Spock, you should know better - disturbing my patients like that!" McCoy's cheerful voice breaks in, so I decide I might as well surface. "And Mr. Baillie! Decided to rejoin us, have you?"

I take a look round. The Captain is sitting up in the next bed, pale but obviously on the mend. Spock is perched on the bed beside him, still looking very unfamiliar in the gold shirt, and McCoy is standing beside them, grinning broadly.

He gives us both a check-up, and tells me I can go back to my quarters if I take things easy for a while - he's hanging on to the Captain until we reach Starbase, though. That's our witch-doctor all over - he never did trust native drugs, and he's worried there might be some side effects from that Zenden potion, so he's taking no chances.

He calls a nurse to help me back to my quarters, and I trot off quite happily. She's much more my idea of entertaining company at the moment - funny I never noticed her before.

Well, next stop is Starbase, and that's when the fur really starts flying. The thing is, Starfleet Command has now got one hell of a problem. On the one hand, Spock prevented the forcible takeover of a friendly planet, and the establishment of a Klingon base in Federation territory; on the other, he did desert his ship when he returned to the Enterprise.

When the top brass don't know what else to do, they hold an enquiry; they call one in this case, and the Captain, McCoy and I are called to give evidence - that's when I finally fit all the pieces together.

As soon as he knew the Captain needed help, Spock realised he had a problem - how to convince Starfleet. He had no evidence, no details, only his own certainty. If he'd been able to say exactly what was wrong, they might have listened, knowing Vulcan telepathic abilities, but they could not be expected to divert the Orion on what was, after all, only a feeling. Spock didn't waste

time asking - he simply ordered his ship to rendezvous with the Enterprise, and as soon as the Orion was within transporter range, he took over. Nobody raised any objections - well, would you argue with Spock? - and anyway. McCoy and Scotty were sick with worry by then. (Their report to Starfleet didn't arrive until after we were rescued, anyway, because of the time lag caused by the distance). Scotty told him that the Captain was under constant guard and that the sensors couldn't locate him, but by now Spock was close enough to use the meld to find him.

Spock tells the court that having locked on to the Captain's mind, he organized a rescue party; he relied on me to catch on fast enough to distract the guards while he beamed down - from Spock, that's some compliment. Well, his plan worked, and we're all here to talk about it.

When all the evidence has been heard, the Board of Inquiry ask Spock if he has anything to say in his defence, and that's when I start to worry. Even if he could bring himself to admit that his concern for Kirk prompted his action, the Court can't take personal feelings into consideration. I'm watching him closely; as he takes his place on the witness stand his eyes meet and hold the Captain's for a long moment before he turns to face the court.

"I admit the charge of desertion," he says very quietly, very calmly. "The Vulcan oath of loyalty to a commander is not... easily broken; although Captain Kirk was no longer my superior officer, he had not formally released me from my oath, and I considered myself bound by it. In addition, when I was transferred to the Orion, I told the Admiral that I neither sought nor desired command - I do not consider myself suitable. She... chose to disregard my warning. I take full responsibility for my actions, and submit myself to whatever punishment the court shall think fit."

The Board then retire to consider their verdict, so McCoy and I return to the Enterprise - the Captain waits with Spock for the result. It seems to take hours, but at last the Captain's voice comes over the communicator.

"Two to beam up, Scotty."

It's impossible to tell anything from his voice; we have to wait until the two figures materialise on the platform, the Captain - and Spock, once more dressed in the familiar blue with commander's stripes. Kirk's grinning broadly as he comes down the steps; Spock is as calm as ever.

"What happened?" McCoy asks eagerly. The Captain chuckles.

"Well, they couldn't make up their minds one way or the other - that Vulcan oath of loyalty really stumped them, they just couldn't get round it. At last they decided that it would be best all round if Spock simply returned quietly to the Enterprise. Nobody quite knows if it's a reward or a punishment, but Spock's got his own way again."

There's no doubt about how the crew see it; I think even Spock is more than a little surprised at the warmth of his reception, though of course he doesn't show it.

Amid all the confusion, I'm the only one close enough to hear the Captain as he says quietly, "Spock, that oath of loyalty... did you really forget to ask me to release you?"

The Vulcan stands silent for a moment, before he raises his eyes to Kirk's. Even more quietly, he replies at last, "Captain, Vulcans... do not forget."

Kirk's grin fades slowly; then he says, "Message received, Mr. Spock... and understood."

ONE GOOD TURN by Security Chief Baillie

Do Vulcans have a sense of humour? Ask most Humans, especially Bones McCoy, and you'll get a resounding 'NO!' for answer; I'd have agreed with that once, but I know of one Vulcan who does - and who displays it at some pretty odd times, too. Such as? Well, such as after the Vebron affair, for instance.

Now that was an interesting problem, and serves to illustrate another maxim of mine, that it doesn't pay to have too much imagination. Oh, sure, it's fine for someone as smart as the Captain, or Mr. Spock - but that time it brought us a whole heap of trouble.

Vebron's an old planet - nothing spectacular, unless you want to count its four moons, which orbit in formation; pretty enough, I suppose, but of no practical value. Uninhabited - though there are traces of the civilisation that ruled it once; no rare minerals; pleasant semi-tropical climate, but the soil is too used-up to be of any use as a colony world. No dangerous wild life, so it's used from time to time as a break for Starship crews operating in that sector - or rather, it was.

It's the Enterprise, of course, that picks up the first hint of trouble. We're tucked safely into orbit, and the first shore parties have already beamed down. McCoy has blackmailed Spock into going with the first group, with the alternative of a week in sickbay if he doesn't cooperate - he's been working flat out in the computer section for the last few weeks, and though he won't admit it, he's almost dropping with fatigue. So our resident Vulcan beams down reluctantly, but not being one to waste time simply relaxing, announces his intention of investigating some ruins. Somewhat to my surprise Sulu volunteers to go with him; but Kyle tells me he overheard the Captain ask him to go along to keep a discreet eye on Spock - the Captain or McCoy would be too obvious.

I follow them down shortly afterwards, with a little red-haired yeoman from Engineering - it looks like a good chance to get to know her better.

Mind you, I should have known - things are just getting interesting when my personal jinx strikes again, in the shape of a call from the Captain.

"Sorry to disturb you, Chief," he says, "but have you seen anything of Mr. Spock and Mr. Sulu?"

"Not lately, sir; but from here I can see the ruins they're investigating. They went in about an hour ago, but they haven't come out yet."

"Would you mind checking up on them?"

"Is something wrong, sir?" I ask, with a nasty feeling that that's an idiotic question if ever I heard one!

"I'm... not sure. The sensors have them pinpointed, but they don't answer a communicator call. We're picking up some unusual readings from that area, and they might be interfering with communications... but I'd feel happier if you'd take a look, Baillie. I don't want to beam them up and find out that there's nothing wrong after all."

"Right, sir," I tell him. "I'll call in as soon as I've made contact with them, so if you haven't heard from me in... say... thirty minutes, assume something's wrong and beam us up."

I'm thinking as I move off that I don't blame the Captain for being wary - Spock's raised an eyebrow at me more than once for taking what he considers unnecessary action, and that's a nasty experience, let me tell you.

Once inside the ruins the only place to go is into a winding passageway twisting down into the ground, so I follow it; it's adequately lit at first where the roof has fallen away, but as a result it's partly blocked and I have to pick my way carefully over the rubble. There are two sets of footprints in the dust, though, so I'm sure I'm heading in the right direction.

After a few moments the atmosphere of the place begins to get to me; there's an aura of great age, a brooding stillness that I find curiously oppressive, and I'm aware of a distinct reluctance to advance any further - I feel as though I'm intruding, somehow; in fact, to tell the truth, if it hadn't been for those tracks leading steadily onwards, I'd've been tempted to turn back. But no way am I going to tell the Captain that I've run out on his favourite Vulcan just because of a feeling!

As I walk the passageway begins to change; the roof is complete now, but a soft light comes from panels of glowing stone set into the walls of what is now a tunnel. They've been deliberately cut and positioned, and I can understand why Spock must have been so interested - nothing like this has been reported before.

I calculate that by now the downward slope of the tunnel has taken me well below ground level, but the air is still fresh - there must be some form of ventilation, though I can't see anything. I take out my communicator to call the ship, but there's no response - something, perhaps those panels, is causing interference with communications as the Captain suspected; funny, though, that their energy readings didn't register on the ship's sensors.

As I walk on I become aware that the sense of repulsion has vanished, to be replaced with an almost compulsive desire to advance further; unconsciously my steps have quickened, and I slow my pace carefully, fighting the attraction - no sense in running headlong into trouble.

Round the next bend, and the soft light increases to a brilliant glow, flooding into the tunnel from a doorway cut into the wall; and huddled against the wall, his face pressed into the stone, is a familiar figure - Sulu. I hurry over to kneel at his side, afraid that he's been hurt; as I put my hand on his shoulder he flinches away, turning to look at me with eyes wide with fear. Gradually recognition seeps into that almost crazed stare, and with a sob of relief he sways towards me; as I reach out to catch him I can feel his body shuddering violently. He clings to me like a terrified child, and I wonder what he's seen to reduce him to such a state.

At last I hear him take a deep breath and he pulls away from me, steadying himself against the wall.

"All right now?" I ask sympathetically, and he nods, so I go on. "Where's Mr. Spock?"

"He went... on, through there." Sulu gestures to the open doorway without looking at it, but as I begin to rise he clutches me frantically, pulling me down.

"No, Baillie! Don't go! There's... something there... I felt it calling, pulling me... it took Mr. Spock... I tried to hold him, but I was thrown back. It was like walking into a force field; there's... intelligence there, I could feel it."

TAKE THE HUMAN AND LEAVE.

The voice comes from everywhere and nowhere, echoing from the walls, resounding in my head; I can't even be sure if it actually is a voice, or if something is reaching my mind, but the experience is shattering, painful.

"Who are you?" My own voice is none too steady.

WE ARE OF VEBRON. THE VULCAN IS ONE WITH US NOW. WE INTEND NO HARM, BUT HUMAN MINDS ARE USELESS TO US, AND CANNOT LONG SURVIVE IN SUCH CLOSE PROXIMITY. GO, AND DO NOT RETURN.

It's as though... something... slides into my mind, taking control of my body; I watch myself pull Sulu to his feet and we turn back along the tunnel. After a few steps Sulu slumps against me and I pick him up and continue my... retreat, herded by that... presence. It fades as I step out of the ruins, and laying Sulu down I pull out my communicator - I'm not facing that again on my

own, and Sulu needs attention fast, he looks to be deep in shock.

Kirk's waiting in the transporter room when we beam up, but when he catches sight of Sulu he steps back and lets me carry him to sickbay; but as soon as I've laid him on the bed and turned away he whirls on me, his eyes blazing.

"Where's Spock?" he demands in that quiet, controlled voice I've learned to recognise.

I tell him about the corridor, the lighted room, and the single set of footprints leading into the doorway; his face tightens in anguish as I describe how I found Sulu, and I know he's visualising the Vulcan as the prey of some malevolent intelligence.

"The voice," he says at last. "Did you see anyone, Baillie?"

"No, Captain; and I can't even be sure it was a voice - it might have been in my head."

"A mind touch," Kirk says thoughtfully. "It would have to be a powerful entity then, to reach you so clearly without physical contact. So now what do we do? Spock's our only telepath, and he's the first victim."

NOT VICTIM, CAPTAIN.

McCoy jumps back as though he's been stung, for this time the voice has a point of origin - it seems to come from Sulu's motionless body.

BE ASSURED, WE INTEND NO HARM. THIS ENTITY WILL RECOVER SHORTLY - WE DID NOT UNDERSTAND THAT HIS MIND WAS SO FRAGILE. THE UNEXPECTED CONTACT WITH US HAS MERELY STUNNED HIM.

"What have you done with Spock?" Kirk's voice is low, dangerous.

HE HAS BEEN ABSORBED INTO THE OVERMIND OF VEBRON. MANY AGES AGO WE GAVE UP PHYSICAL FORM AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY TO COMBINE INTO THE OVERMIND. NOW WE ARE IMMORTAL, EXISTING AS A COMPLEX UNITY. WE EXTEND OUR KNOWLEDGE BY LEARNING FROM THE LIFE-FORMS THAT VISIT US, BUT WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO LEAVE - INDEED, WE COULD NOT. OCCASIONALLY WE RECEIVE A VISITOR WHOSE MIND IS STRONG ENOUGH TO JOIN US; SUCH A ONE IS THE BEING YOU CALL 'SPOCK'. HE WAS DRAWN TO US, AND HIS MIND HAS BLENDED WITH OURS. AFTER PHYSICAL DEATH HIS IDENTITY WILL CONTINUE HERE. IT WAS HIS OWN CHOICE - WE DO NOT COMPEL.

"I don't believe that!" Kirk breaks in angrily. "I want to see him, talk to him - I'll only believe it if he tells me so himself."

IT MAY BE DANGEROUS. YOU YOURSELF MAY BE DRAWN IN, OR THE SHOCK OF CONTACT MAY DESTROY YOU IF YOU APPROACH TOO CLOSELY.

"I don't care - I won't leave Spock unless I'm certain it's what he wants. I'm coming down."

AS YOU WISH, CAPTAIN. WE SHALL AWAIT YOU.

As the voice fades Kirk sways unsteadily and I reach out to help him to a seat. I remember McCoy telling me once that repeated mind links with Spock have sensitised the Captain to telepathic communications; even I feel the power of the Overmind, so I guess it must affect him even more strongly.

McCoy comes over and checks him out. "You'll be all right, Jim," he says, "it's just the strain of contact. Sulu's sleeping naturally now - he'll be back to normal when he wakes up. Now, what are you going to do about Spock?"

"I'm going down to talk to him," the Captain replies. "If it's really what he wants I won't stand in his way... but I must be sure. You understand, don't you, Bones?"

They look at each other steadily, then McCoy sighs and nods reluctantly. "Just be careful, Jim."

Over Kirk's head the blue eyes meet mine questioningly, and I signal back

agreement. "I'll go with you, Captain. The Overmind doesn't seem to bother me too much, but the contact tires you, and you might need help to return."

"Thanks, Baillie," the Captain says. "No point in wasting time -- let's go."

The sense of oppression has vanished as I follow Kirk along the tunnel, but I'm feeling very uneasy. I've worked with these two men for a long time now, and I'm used to them -- I know what Starfleet will lose if the team is broken. I'm also worried about the Captain -- that strange world of the mind, with which the Vulcan is so familiar, might be a refuge for Spock, but to Kirk it will mean losing his friend as surely as to death.

We reach the doorway, and I don't mind admitting that I don't look too closely into the light; but the Captain stands gazing directly ahead like a man seeing a vision -- but whether of Heaven or Hell I wouldn't like to guess. All I know is that I can feel the tension in him as he waits, sense the urgency of the longing he is trying to control: and my heart sinks then, for I know that he won't use the friendship between them in an attempt to change Spock's mind.

APPROACH NO CLOSER. YOU RISK BEING DRAWN INTO THE OVERMIND, AND WE DO NOT WISH TO HARM YOU.

The Captain's intent gaze doesn't waver for an instant from that brilliant light.

"Spock, where are you?" he calls.

I'm watching his face as he speaks, and I see joy and relief fill his eyes as he instinctively stretches out his hands.

"Do not attempt to touch me, Captain."

The sheer normality of the voice sends a shudder through me and I involuntarily turn my head towards the light to see the tall, lean figure take shape in the radiance. Spock remains poised in the doorway, his dark eyes fixed on the Captain with an almost wistful expression of regret. I think Kirk knows right then, for his hands fall to his sides.

"Why, Spock?" he asks huskily, and the pain in his voice reaches even to me. There's not even a flicker in the dark eyes, serene and untroubled now.

"I have sought long for this," the Vulcan replies calmly. "To be part of the Overmind, untorn by doubt or emotion; to be free at last of a conflict I cannot resolve, and can no longer endure. Here I have found peace, a sense of fulfillment -- I can be of value."

The Captain moves closer, pausing as Spock lifts a hand in warning; as he waits, seeking for words, I'm watching the Vulcan closely. It seems to me there's something... odd... about Spock, an almost transparent appearance, although the Captain hasn't reacted to it. I concentrate carefully, and when I'm sure I touch Kirk's arm; he turns to me impatiently.

"Well, Baillie?"

"Sir, that's not Mr. Spock."

"Don't be ridiculous!" His voice is raw with pain. "Do you think I wouldn't know...?"

"Mr. Baillie is correct, however," the serene voice confirms, unexpectedly. "My body still lives, Captain, but its proximity to the core of the Overmind is rapidly draining its strength -- it could not now reach the door. What you see is a projection which I have produced with the help of the Overmind -- I have approached you in this fashion because I know that you find purely telepathic contact disturbing, and I do not wish to cause you distress

by touching your mind - linked as I am, the contact would cause you pain."

"What's going to happen to you?" Kirk asks dazedly; he's accepted the reality already, even if he doesn't know it yet.

"As the energy drain continues my body will weaken and die within hours, but I will continue as part of the Overmind, learning, growing... you cannot imagine the wonder of becoming part of such an entity."

Kirk takes a step backwards then; his face is expressionless, but his left hand, unseen by Spock, is tightly clenched - and there's a smear of blood where the nails have driven deep into the palm.

"Is this really what you want?" Kirk asks dully. "Will it make you happy?"

"I do not know - but it will bring me peace."

"Then I wish you well, Spock - even if I'll never understand."

"Thank you, Jim. Please inform my family - Sarek will understand why I do this. Now I suggest that you return to the ship - the Overmind will inform you when my physical existence has ended."

For a moment he pauses, then the deep voice takes on the warm tone I've only ever heard him use to the Captain. "I am sorry, Jim; but for me, it is the logical way."

"Logical!" The word is almost a sob.

"Go, now, my friend; it is dangerous for you to remain any longer. Farewell, Jim."

"Goodbye, Spock."

They look at each other a moment longer then Kirk turns abruptly away and sets off down the tunnel. As I follow him around the corner I can't resist looking back to see the Vulcan still staring after him, with an expression I never thought to see on that impassive face.

But Kirk is my first concern now. When I reach him he's leaning against the wall, one hand over his eyes. He straightens and turns at my approach.

"Come on, Mr. Baillie - there's nothing for us here, now."

As I follow his stocky figure back along the tunnel the echo of his bitter words seems to ring in my ears; and somehow, I'm not so sure.

McCoy is waiting in the transporter room when we return. He takes one look at Kirk's face and dismisses Kyle with a nod.

"What happened, Jim?"

"He... he's staying, Bones. It's what he wants, and I can't... Oh God!" A shuddering breath that might almost be a sob.

"Damned Vulcan!" McCoy's growl doesn't fool me - I can hear the grief in his tone. "So your living computer finally ran out on you. Just goes to show you can't trust a Vulcan... but I'd have staked my life that his Human half was strong enough to keep him loyal - at least to you."

"Drop it, Bones." Kirk's voice is unutterably weary. "It's easy for us - we've never had to live with what he's got to bear, constantly torn in two, an alien both on Earth and Vulcan. I've never understood how Sarek and Amanda could have allowed... they must have known what their child would go through. He's found peace at last, and I can't regret it for him; only for myself because ... because I couldn't help him after all." The last few words are almost a whisper; then he straightens and turns deliberately towards the door.

"I'll tell Scotty to hold orbit until morning, or until we hear from the Overmind. It may not be... logical... but I can't leave here while he's still

alive, at least physically. No-one is to beam down without my direct order, Mr. Baillie - it's too dangerous. I could feel the lure of the Overmind drawing me in, and something in me wanted to go... I don't have Spock's strength, I'd be destroyed totally."

Queer, I think. I didn't sense that; a certain curiosity, maybe, but basically repulsion.

But it's not my place to argue with the Captain. "Yes, sir," I reply. "I'll tell Mr. Kyle."

The hours of the ship's night crawl past with agonising slowness. It's none of my business, but I can't help thinking about Mr. Spock down there on Vebron. God knows, he's weird enough at the best of times, but now he's being changed into something I can't even begin to understand, and a cold sick feeling grips me as I begin to think of how the ship will feel without his calm presence on board.

In an attempt to keep busy I decide to carry out a Security inspection, but at every turn of the corridor memories rise up to distract me.

The transporter room - and I see Kirk's face the day he and Spock returned from the hearing which stripped the Vulcan of Captain's rank and returned him to us as First Officer.

Shuttlecraft bay - watching Spock take off alone to probe the amoeba-creature that almost destroyed us in Sector 39J.

The briefing room, and the conversation no-one knows I overheard when, contaminated by the Psi 2000 virus, the barriers of custom and tradition first began to fall between Kirk and Spock.

The cargo holds - and the time the Vulcan was almost killed in a Romulan attack during which I learned a few surprising things about our First Officer.

Sickbay, quiet and deserted now - but how many battles I've witnessed there as one fought for the other's life or sanity.

The ship is quiet, secure, but I expect no less- I train my staff well. At last the elevator drops me near the officers' quarters, and I find my steps slowing involuntarily.

Kirk's door; I hesitate, but pass on - what can I say to him? McCoy's, but what can he do? The bitter quotation comes to mind; physician, heal thyself - and him, if you can.

Finally, Spock's; the door stands ajar, and curiosity fills me - who comes here at such a time? But I already know as I peer carefully into the dimly-lit room.

Kirk is sitting absolutely still, his face half turned from me, but every line of his body betrays wretchedness and misery. It's a weird vigil he's keeping there in the gloom, a death watch for a friend lost, not to death, but to a strange new life in which he can have no part. And all I can do for him is to leave him alone with his thoughts, never letting him know that I've seen tears in his eyes for a man who would deny response to them.

As I return to the elevator my pity for Kirk is gradually replaced by another emotion - a surge of overwhelming anger directed at Spock, an anger which sends me running down into the transporter room to confront a bewildered Kyle.

"Beam me down!" I order him.

"But Chief - the Captain said..."

Now I know - and he knows I know - one or two things about Mr. Kyle's off-duty activities that he'd rather weren't brought to the Captain's attention; so when I tell him that it's for Kirk's sake I'm going, and drop a few

hints about what I'll have to say if he doesn't cooperate - well, he caves in and moves to the controls.

So, sooner than I'd like I find myself back in that tunnel, wondering why I keep talking myself into this sort of trouble, and how the hell I'm going to get out of it this time.

The Overmind is aware of my presence; I can feel it around me, questioning, puzzled, but I plough on grimly, refusing to acknowledge it until I reach the by now familiar doorway in the rock. The emanations from the room beyond are weakening me, drawing at my life and energy. A warning beats in my head, urging me away - the Overmind is concerned, has no wish to harm me, but it is curious as to my purpose, and delays forcing me to go. I concentrate, channelling all my anger and grief into one urgent plea.

"Spock!"

I'm no telepath; I must use speech, and the echoes of my cry are absorbed by the pulsating light. Will he come to me as he came to the Captain, or must I try to speak with a disembodied voice in my mind? Or... will he refuse to come at all?

"Spock, answer me!"

There is... a response, a stirring in the brightness. Slowly the familiar figure takes shape before me.

"Return to the Enterprise, Mr. Baillie; you have no business here."

Even before I begin I fear defeat - what arguments of mine can disturb that calm certainty?

But I have a weapon he can scarcely understand, raw emotion unleashed in the service of one who will not use it on his own behalf. I allow the anger full rein, and it comes through clearly in my voice.

"I have; but have you?"

"My choice is decided; leave me."

"Yes, I'll go if I must - but not before I've shown you what you are. You're a coward, Spock, running out on those who need you - and care for you. So you're sick of being alone? Well, tough! Don't you think he is, too?"

"Did he send you?" A spark of anger.

"When did he ever send anyone to plead for him?" I sneer contemptuously. "You're changing already, Spock - there was a time when you'd never have considered such a despicable idea. He's tried so hard to help you, but you wouldn't let him, would you - he's only 'Human' after all, and that's a dirty word to you, isn't it, Spock? Try asking yourself just what the Overmind will make of you. Sure, you'll lose your doubt, your loneliness, the conflict that rends you - but you'll lose other things too; your compassion, your understanding, the love I know you can feel for those who need you. It seems so easy, doesn't it, to be free of emotion? You'll have the Vulcan detachment you always wanted - but you'll pay a hell of a price for it, and so will others. 'My father will understand' you said... oh sure, he will, but what about your mother? The Captain is going to have to tell her that her precious son was so ashamed of his Human blood he just gave up. That'll make her feel just great, won't it? And you'll pay too. You are half-Human, and all the wanting in the world won't change that; no Human could live like this - for ever - without going insane in the end."

I gradually allow my voice to soften, and continue pleadingly, "You taught me what courage meant - not only in a physical sense, but in the way you faced up to what you are. I can understand how hard it must have been sometimes, but you've achieved so much - don't throw it away now."

He's listening to me at least, but I can detect no softening in those

remote eyes. However, I have another card, the dirtiest in the pack, and I don't scruple to play it now.

"He wouldn't stoop to plead emotion to you, but I will. Do you know, or care, what he's doing now? He's sitting in your cabin, quietly, in the dark, because he can't leave until he knows you're dead; and he's crying for you, Spock. What a bloody contemptible idea - the Overmind will calmly inform him that his best friend is dead! I could spit on you for that damnable cruelty! Just what does it take to make you admit that you're Human too? Hasn't he done enough yet to earn your trust? That time when he had to get you to Vulcan - you never knew that he defied explicit Starfleet orders to get you there; they'd have crucified him if T'Pol hadn't intervened. God knows, I never thought I'd see the day when she was more merciful than you!

And that time you were stranded on Taurus II - he came within a hairs-breadth of mutiny then; if it hadn't been for the colonists on New Paris he'd have clapped Ferris in the brig and stayed there until he found you.

Even that scar on your forehead - you'd be dead now if he hadn't pulled you clear of that rockfall last week.

How are you going to repay him, Spock? Will you crawl back to the safe protection of the Overmind - or will you come back with me now, back where you belong?"

That's it; I've said my piece, the longest speech I've made for many a day. Now I can only wait to see what effect I've had. The Vulcan stands before me, his face impassive, his eyes concealed under half-lowered lids.

I can sense that the Overmind too is waiting for Spock's decision; it is around me, patient, enquiring, and for the first time I can see it as something other than a threat. It's an intelligent life-form, after all, and it only wants to increase its knowledge as we do; but now I understand that it will not compel anyone to join it.

At last, with a faint sigh, the dark lashes lift, and the unfathomable eyes look deep into mine.

"The supreme irony, Mr. Baillie." The voice is faint, weary. "I concede your arguments; but it is... too late."

"Too late?" I whisper.

"The Overmind has taken too much from me, has drained my energy. I will soon become part of the complex; I cannot escape its field now, I do not have the strength to move."

Before my startled gaze the image of Spock wavers, begins to fade.

"Unfortunate, I would have liked... tell him..." The voice ceases abruptly; the figure shimmers and is gone.

For a moment I stare blankly at the curtain of light, trying to realise that on the very brink of success I have failed; it's not a nice thought. Then, that... voice... echoes in my head.

HUMAN, IF YOU HAVE THE COURAGE, ACT SWIFTLY. THE ONE NAMED SPOCK STILL LIVES, BUT HIS CONSCIOUSNESS IS ALMOST GONE. IF YOU TRUST US WE WILL LEAD YOU TO HIM, FOR WE WOULD NOT HOLD ONE WHO IS UNWILLING. CONCENTRATE ONLY ON HE WHOM YOU SEEK, AND WE WILL GUIDE YOU. DECIDE NOW IF YOU WILL MAKE THE ATTEMPT.

I don't have much choice, really; I'm not going back to tell the Captain that I had the chance to bring his Vulcan out and refused to take it. Besides, the way I figure it, I owe it to Spock too - I'm the one who raised doubts in his mind, convinced him that he should return. Taking a deep breath I step forward into the light.

The core of the Overmind... I have no real idea what it's like. Some of it I forgot, some I never saw, and most of what I did see I can't make sense of anyway.

The vital thing is not to look up, to keep my eyes firmly on the floor; but even the shadows are... disturbing. I can feel the light swirling about me, almost tangible in its intensity.

Don't think, I warn myself. Just concentrate on keeping moving.

Again comes that sense of being herded, guided to where the Overmind wishes to lead me, and I yield to it, knowing that if I try to look around to locate Spock myself, I'll be lost. I can feel the pressure against my mind; so close, the sheer energy generated by this strange being is drawing at mine, sucking it out. It's so difficult even to walk - the strength is being leached from me, and I even have to concentrate hard to remember why I'm here at all. At last I'm reduced to crawling, my eyes clamped shut against the hypnotic pulsations of the light, my hands groping before me.

Eventually my fingers brush against something soft and velvety, the familiar texture of a Starfleet shirt; I risk taking a look.

It's Spock, lying on his side, his face pillowed on one outstretched arm, his hands reaching towards... no, I will not remember!

His face is pale, serene, almost glowing in the halo of flickering fire that seems to outline his body, and for a moment I wonder if I'm in time, he lies so still.

It's too dangerous for me to linger, the energy drain is increasing all the time; somehow I manage to gather him under one arm and begin the slow, agonising crawl back the way I came. If it was difficult to reach him, it's even more so to return; something within me is beginning to feel an almost overwhelming longing to give up, to allow myself to merge, to blend with the awesome power around me.

Two things save me. Fear; for I know that while Spock's mind is strong enough to retain identity as part of the Overmind, mine is not - I'd be totally absorbed, overwhelmed, annihilated.

The second? Merely a memory - the vision of Kirk's haunted eyes. There is also, I think, help from the Overmind itself; for it is not malevolent, has no wish to harm me - or even to retain Spock as an unwilling component.

At last, aeons later, I find myself back in the tunnel, Spock's limp body cradled in my arms, and with no memory of travelling the last few yards. The energy drain has lessened out of the direct presence of the Overmind, and although still weak I manage to pull myself shakily to my feet. There's no time to be lost - to me Spock looks dead already - but I owe a debt; I make myself turn back to face the light.

"Thank you," I say simply. The pulse of the Overmind beats in my brain.

THANKS ARE UNNECESSARY; WE REGRET HAVING CAUSED DISTRESS. THE VULCAN'S MIND WOULD HAVE ENRICHED US, BUT WE UNDERSTAND NOW THE HARM WE WOULD HAVE DONE. THE CONFLICT IS ESSENTIAL TO HIM - HE MUST ACCEPT WHAT HE IS, OR STRUGGLE AGAINST IT, BUT THE PEACE WE THOUGHT TO OFFER WOULD BE DEATH TO HIS MIND. WE MUST BE MORE CAREFUL IN OUR CONTACT WITH OTHER LIFE FORMS. AND NOW, YOU MUST GO.

Obediently I lift Spock up and for the last time retreat along the tunnel. The night sky has never looked so beautifully normal, so welcome, and I enjoy breathing the cool air while I pull out my communicator; Kyle looks on to my signal, and beams us up.

When I carry my burden from the transporter pad I see Kyle reaching for the intercom.

"No!" I tell him sharply. "Don't call the Captain yet - let me get Mr. Spock to sickbay first. Time enough when we know how he is."

Kyle nods in understanding and I carry Spock through the deserted corridors to sickbay. With a sigh of relief I dump him on the nearest bed - he might be thin, but he's no lightweight - and go in search of McCoy.

He's sitting at his desk, his head resting on his arms, but he sits up at once when I come in. The blue eyes are very bright; he's been sharing Kirk's vigil in his own quiet way, unable to relax as long as there's any hope.

"What do you want at this hour, Baillie?" he grumbles as usual; but his heart isn't in it, it's pure habit. I jerk a thumb in the direction of sickbay.

"Patient for you," I tell him. "He looks in a bad way."

Give McCoy his due, he's no slouch when a patient needs him, whatever his personal troubles; he's moving even as I'm speaking.

He checks for just an instant as he recognises the patient, but it's the sort of shock you recover from quickly - he's already in action as I reach the bed.

I watch the life indicators carefully - I've picked up enough by now to get a rough idea of Spock's condition. The readings are low - very low - but steady, and when McCoy returns the last hypo to the tray and steps back his eyes confirm my instinctive sigh of relief.

"Does Jim know?" he asks, turning to the intercom.

"No, I didn't want to tell him until I was sure Spock would make it." A sudden impulse makes me reach for the intercom before he can. "I'll tell him, Doctor." McCoy might guess, but it's my belief the Captain won't want it broadcast where he spent the night. For that reason I ask for shipwide relay.

"Captain Kirk to sickbay, please."

When I look round McCoy's again leaning over the bed; he grunts with satisfaction. "He should be coming round soon," he says over his shoulder.

At that, Kirk comes through the door; his face is carefully controlled - too carefully. His eyes move from me to the occupied McCoy and back again.

"What's the problem?" he asks crisply.

As McCoy steps back I indicate the bed, and he follows my gesture. He gives a sudden sharp intake of breath, then stands motionless for a moment before taking a hesitant step forward.

"Spock?" His voice is husky with disbelief, his eyes wide as he stares in bewilderment.

"Yes, it's Spock," McCoy confirms, struggling between tears and laughter. "Almost as good as new - he'll be plaguing the life out of me before I can turn round."

"But... how?" Kirk asks, puzzled.

"Don't ask me. All I know is that Baillie strolled in about ten minutes ago and dumped him on the bed."

Kirk's gaze flickers to me, then back to the bed; only a fleeting glance, but his expressive eyes say all I need to know.

To an observer it must look a bit odd, the three of us staring moon-struck at that quiet figure; I can't see Kirk's face, but McCoy's grinning like an idiot, and I don't know that I'm any better. It's Kirk who moves first, stepping forward to sit on the bed as though he's suddenly none too sure of his legs.

Hesitantly he reaches out to lay a gentle hand on Spock's face; at the touch the dark eyes open, clouded with confusion. As they focus on Kirk's face I see them clear into a blazing delight, and the Vulcan's lips soundlessly form the word 'Jim!'

Kirk leans closer at that, and McCoy's touch on my arm reminds me that neither of us are needed here; resisting the temptation to linger I follow him into his office.

Without a word McCoy pours two large brandies and hands me one, raising his own glass in silent salute. As the powerful stuff hits me I feel myself reeling, and before I know where I am he's got me sitting down, his scanner whirring.

"Were you exposed to that... Overmind?" he asks with concern.

"Yes; but I think it shielded me as much as possible. I don't feel too bad now, but at the time..." I shudder, and reach again for my glass.

McCoy claps me on the shoulder. "Sheer exhaustion," he says. "You can't have been as sensitive to the mental effects as Spock. Come on, I'm prescribing a few days' rest; I'll take you to your quarters, and make sure you get a good night's sleep."

And I'm glad of his supportive arm as we head for the elevator.

I'm still confined to quarters next day when Kirk comes in to see me. He says that Spock's in worse shape than I am owing to his longer exposure, but with him too it's only exhaustion, and he'll be fine.

I fill him in on what happened on Vebron, stressing my impression that the Overmind meant no harm, and he nods understandingly.

"The Overmind contacted me before we left orbit," he says. "Now that its existence is known it is prepared to accept official contact with the Federation, so from now on it will be approached with the appropriate safeguards on both sides. But we've lost a shore-leave planet."

"Can't say I'm sorry," I tell him. "It may be harmless, but it makes me uncomfortable. That sort of thing is best left to those who understand it."

He laughs, but then his eyes grow serious. "Baillie - thanks for what you did - but what possessed you to take such a risk?" He shudders. "Even I could feel the power, the attraction - why weren't you drawn in?"

"I don't know. It just didn't seem so... compulsive to me. As for why..." I hesitate, decide this is getting too serious. "Sheer self-defence, sir," I tell him virtuously. "I'm used to Mr. Spock's ways - a new First Officer would be bound to turn the Security Section upside down just on principle, and I've already got it working nicely."

Kirk laughs again, and rises to leave. "Have it your own way, Baillie," he says. "But... thanks."

I'm rather dreading my next meeting with Spock, but I needn't have worried. It's not just chance that he catches up with me in the elevator when I'm reporting back for duty. He doesn't say much, but those eyes of his express all that is necessary - neither of us are given to making speeches. I took a chance and it came off; he knows and appreciates the fact, and for myself, I'm just glad that everything's back to normal.

It's not something I spend a lot of time brooding about. I don't know what the Overmind really was, and I don't want to know, but I do know this; Spock's sensitivity to it caught him in a trap he'd have grown to hate. The Captain - he felt it too, could never have survived as I did. He wanted to

go after Spock himself, make no mistake, but knew that if he did he'd be lost to the ship where he was needed. Their imaginations showed them what they would have gained as part of the Overmind, and almost made them forget what they would have lost. But me... well, I'm the stolid, unimaginative sort; there was nothing there to lure me, so I succeeded where the Captain, for all his brains, would have failed. There are times when too much awareness can be a real handicap.

But I started out to prove that Spock's not totally devoid of his own weird sense of humour. I'm in McCoy's office waiting for my official discharge as fit for duty when I hear one of the nurses collar him just outside the door.

"Excuse me, Doctor, but we don't seem to have Chief Baillie's first name recorded in his medical files."

"Curious - still, he's in my office now; give me the form, and I'll ask him."

No you won't! I think, making a hasty exit by the other door; but McCoy's thorough - he'll get to me sooner or later, and when I refuse to tell him he'll pull the information from my personal file in the main computer.

There's not a darn thing I can do to stop him either, but with vague ideas of maybe wiping my tape somehow, or even, as a last resort, blowing up the whole damn thing, I head for the main computer terminal. I'm standing there staring gloomily at the monster when Spock walks in, and of course wants to know what I'm doing there. I'm so depressed by now, I tell him before I realise it.

One delicate eyebrow rises in interrogation, but I stare dumbly at the floor - I'm not telling even him. After a moment he says,

"Well, Mr. Baillie, since the matter causes you some distress, I propose a compromise. I cannot wipe the information from the computer banks, but I can restrict the information so that it will be released only on my authorisation, or the Captain's, or yours. Will that be satisfactory?"

Satisfactory! I should say so! Kirk's never likely to want to know, and Mr. Spock would never stoop to vulgar curiosity, so I'm safe from any prying.

That man may say he doesn't understand Humans - but he sure tries hard!

SPOCK....TO BONES by Gladys Oliver

Craggy brows raised in query,
and verbal repartee!
And I know that the Doctor's in full flood,
Berating and prodding me!

Oh Bones McCoy, where would I be?
In this Vulcan shell of mine,
Without your dubious whip and wit
To release this man sometimes.

So carry on, dear Doctor,
... and I will always try
To give you cause to practice
Your sarcasm in full cry!

DECISION.

There's an insidious attraction about the third shift that can be experienced at no other time; walking the corridors of the Enterprise, riding the turbo lifts that give the impression of moving more slowly at this hour, the quiet exchanges with the technicians on duty, those highly-trained specialists it's my job to guard. Someone once likened it to tiptoeing around a sleeping giant, but to my way of thinking, whoever said that got it wrong. She's more like a great, lazy cat, surveying the universe through sleepy eyes - but just as the cat will be all quivering life and attention at the merest suspicion of a mouse, so within the first notes of the red alert being sounded, the corridors will be filled with hurrying, tense-faced crewmen ready to cope with whatever emergency has arisen.

Usually, though, everything is quiet, and my nightly wanderings through the ship give me my only opportunity to get to know some of the officers as their shift pattern rotates. It's surprising what you can learn from such a habit - where Kyle spends his off-duty time, for instance, and the curious use Kevin Riley once found for the gym locker room, even who isn't where they should be at any given hour of the night - but for the most part I keep my mouth shut as long as there's no neglect of duty, or the risk of danger to the ship. Well, we've got 430 healthy young adults on board - and besides, such knowledge can often come in useful when I need a favour, that's not strictly according to the book - but I think I've mentioned that before.

So almost every night I make my rounds. It's a habit I got into early on, and I don't think I could break it if I tried - I need only a few hours sleep, and I'd sooner be up and doing than sitting in my quarters staring at a blank wall.

I'm not the only one with the habit, either. Often I've met the Captain engaged in much the same routine - in fact, many's the night we've made the rounds together, "putting the ship to bed", as he called it once. We don't often talk much, but when we do it's usually important to one or the other of us.

I remember the first night we met like that. I'd not long been transferred to the Enterprise, and I was still learning my way around the ship. The observation deck drew me like a magnet, and I was too far into the room to retreat when I saw that the Captain was already there.

This I will say for Kirk - he doesn't insist on strict formality in off-duty time; he greets me - remembering my name, a trick he's got - and we talk generalities for a few minutes.

He's obviously got something on his mind, though, and despite my recent transfer ship's gossip has already made me aware of the problem - our Security Chief, Renata Carmel.

Now don't get me wrong, I've nothing against women in Security. Hallam, my Second, is one of the best operators I've ever known, male or female, and I started my training with Chief Flynn, who had so much going for her it wasn't true. She could've walked into any bar on Rigel and had every man in the place clustered round her in two seconds flat; she was intelligent, a good officer - and in hand-to-hand combat I'd back her against any Klingon born.

Trouble with Chief Carmel is, she's got an eye for Kirk. It's common talk that he's interested too, and that's bad, even though he's fought against it so far - if he hadn't the crew would know, believe me.

See, it's a difficult situation. Kirk's a good enough Captain to know that he's got to get her off the ship before things become serious between them - on any ship there are always those looking for signs of favouritism. A Captain can't afford to become romantically attached to

one of his crew - and if the officer involved is the Security Chief, that's really bad for morale, something it seems Carmel has forgotten. She should've asked for a transfer as soon as she saw how things were going; she hasn't, and I can understand that Kirk is reluctant to request a replacement without a good reason - Starfleet Command are bound to count it against her.

Now, Security Guards are not supposed to hand out unasked-for advice to Starship Captains; so I don't. Instead I start to tell Kirk, as it might be casually, of a tape I've just had from a friend in Security Central.

It seems that Starfleet intend to set up a base on Lauren, a planet that's recently been admitted to the Federation. Snag is, Lauren's a matriarchy of the strictest kind, and while they're prepared to negotiate with men off-world, on the mother planet they insist that no male can hold a position of authority. Starfleet want that base, and they're busy assigning a female Starbase Commander, female C.M.O., female Chief Engineer... and they're on the lookout for a female Security Chief.

I'm carefully not looking at Kirk as I tell him that, and when I turn round his face is perfectly bland; but you can see the wheels turning. It's impossible to get Carmel off the ship without giving a good reason, and to give the true reason would be embarrassing for them both; but to recommend the Chief for a promotion...

We talk for a few minutes longer, then Kirk says goodnight and leaves. For myself, having planted the thought in his mind, I wait to see if it takes root.

It sure enough does. A few weeks later Chief Carmel is promoted to the Starbase on Lauren, and in her place we get Chief Derwent, a tough, no-nonsense Englishman. He's within a few years of retirement, and is about as romantic as... well, as a Vulcan. And on Chief Derwent's retirement, as you already know, I'm promoted Security Chief in his place.

Kirk's never referred to the incident except once, and obliquely. I'd just told him I thought Hallam would make a good Second. He looked at me sort of sideways, and said nothing for a moment.

"Are you...er... quite sure, Chief?" he asks at last.

"No problem, Captain," I assure him firmly. "I trained her myself."

"Oh. Oh well, in that case..."

I'm remembering that night as I hurry along the corridor to the Observation deck. That's where Kirk'll be if I know my Captain, and sure enough there he is, gazing down at the slowly-turning globe of Winifer.

He turns at my entrance. "I've just been writing to Travers' and Yeo's families. Any word on Lefarge?"

"He'll pull through, Dr. McCoy says."

"Good. At least we've salvaged something from this mess." He sighs, and begins to pace the deck, as he does when he's troubled. "Lord knows why Starfleet gave the President such discretion, Baillie. I tried again, you know - he still refuses permission to beam down a rescue party."

"I know, sir."

Watching Kirk as he slumps into a chair I have the sudden urge to beam down and strangle President Brend, very slowly. We've been at Winifer less than 48 hours, and already there are two good men dead, one seriously injured. And one...

It's that one we're both thinking of now. Spock. Alive, and in enemy hands... and that's all we know.

How it came about, we're ordered to Winifer and instructed to place the Enterprise at the disposal of President Brand. His planet is currently negotiating Federation membership, and the Council badly wants its deposits of rare metals. So - no leeway. Whatever the President wants, he gets. No arguments, no discussion.

The problem, it seems, is a revolutionary group more interested in returning Winifer to "the old ways" - groups of tribesmen, nomadic, constantly at war. Any outworld influence is corruption, to be destroyed mercilessly; and as prospective allies of the Federation, that includes President Brand's government. The rebel leader, Mavan, has already rejected any attempt at negotiation by the simple expedient of killing all ambassadors sent to him; and though at first nothing more than a minor nuisance, his influence is spreading, so that Brand is delighted to be able to call on the powers of his new ally.

Kirk is speaking aloud, as much to himself as to me, going over and over the events of the day, searching for answers, wondering if something he'd done, or left undone, had caused the deaths of his men.

"I should have waited until the storm cleared and beamed down," he says softly. "But no - President Brand insisted he couldn't wait, and I went down by shuttlecraft. The talks... quite a humane proposal, really, to round up Mavan's followers and exile them to Winifer's sister-planet Enav. They could have survived there, flourished, with their own system of government - and free of corrupting influences, they'd have no desire to return. Spock approved the solution - and he had all the data - atmosphere, climate, food sources, all suitable, no impossible hazards for them. Exile, or a bloody civil war... Brand chose to round up the dissidents before they did too much damage - and he wants the Enterprise to transport them, their families and belongings, to Enav. He was pleased that we'd used the shuttlecraft - he said that Mavan has spies in his headquarters, and he didn't want word getting back that a starship was in orbit. He passed us off as just another negotiating team." Kirk rises, and begins to pace again. "Starfleet's agreement was a mere formality, but I had to contact them. The storm was over, so I beamed up, while Spock and the others returned by shuttlecraft. And then..."

The rest, I know only too well. An overdue shuttlecraft, a hasty sensor scan locating the wreckage - and President Brand's refusal to allow a rescue party to beam down.

"Quite impossible, Captain." The determined face peers out implacably from the screen. "Your craft was sabotaged by one of Mavan's agents. His message was intercepted - Mavan believes, as I planned, that it was a small delegation only. He must not suspect the presence of a starship until my plans are complete - the arrival of one of your search teams would alert him instantly. My troops will investigate the crash, Captain, and report to you. I forbid any member of your crew to beam down without my express permission."

It's a long, tense wait until the report comes in that the bodies of my two Security men have been found in the wrecked shuttle. Lefarge, the pilot, is barely alive; but there's no sign of Spock.

As a concession to Lefarge's serious condition we're allowed to beam him up from inside the shuttle, but the bodies are taken back to the city to await collection at a later date.

The troops report tracks leading from the wreck, and Kirk orders a sensor scan for Vulcan readings. We're all trying to convince ourselves that Mavan's men must have searched the wreck, found Spock alive, and thought it worthwhile to take him in an attempt to force Brand into surrender - a Starfleet officer would be a valuable hostage, but the rebels would have no use for a dead body.

Kirk's already on call to the President's office when Chekov turns from the sensors.

"Captain, Vulcan readings located. But sir - he's with a large group of rebels, several hundred strong."

"I understand your feelings, Captain." Brand is attempting to explain, but Kirk isn't doing too good a job of listening. "We expected this - Mavan is concentrating his forces at his main encampment. I too have my spies - unknown to him, government troops are in readiness to round up the entire group. Have no fear - I am sure Mavan would not dare harm a senior Starfleet officer, even though he rejects alliance, and I will personally give orders that one of my most capable officers has the assignment of locating and protecting Commander Spock when we attack."

"Sir, Mavan could..."

"Enough, Captain! I respect and admire your loyalty, but I cannot risk the safety of my people for one man. Mavan is a mad wolf - if he is allowed to remain free many innocent citizens will die. There will be no interference from you; but," his voice softens, "you will be notified as soon as your officer is safe. This discussion is now ended."

As the image fades from the screen Kirk slams his hand down on the arm of the command chair.

"Mr. Chekov." His voice is tight, controlled. "Stay locked onto Mr. Spock's readings. I want to know of any change in his position or circumstances at once."

"Yes, sir."

That was five hours ago, and now I'm face to face with Kirk - a Kirk whose carefully-controlled expression is one I've seen a hundred times before, an expression that tells me he's made up his mind, and won't be turned from his decision.

"I'm going down, Mr. Baillie."

"Sir, you were ordered not to interfere..."

"Oh, I won't interfere - but that man down there just happens to be my friend as well as my First Officer. We can't beam him up in case we alert the rebels to the presence of the Enterprise... but it might be possible for me to create a diversion, give him the chance to escape from the camp. Then, when he's alone, we could beam him up, and they'd think he was hiding somewhere. At least I can go down and size up the situation for myself... but I can't just sit here and do nothing."

Being Kirk, I know that he can't. I nod my head. "Let's go, Captain."

"I can't ask you..."

"You're not asking - I'm volunteering," I correct him. "Two can create a better diversion than one, and as Security Chief, your safety is my responsibility."

"If anything goes wrong we'll both be in trouble."

"If anything goes wrong two of us stand a better chance of putting it right."

Kirk wastes no time, but calls Scotty to meet us in the transporter room. While we wait, he removes his phaser and orders me to leave mine.

"I'm going down in strict defiance of orders, Scotty," he tells the horrified engineer. "Mr. Baillie is coming on his own responsibility. If we go down armed, I'll be tempted to snatch Spock by force. Like this,

we'll be forced to take him quietly - and with luck no-one will know until it's all over that we've been there."

"But the rebels are bound to have guards with him," Scotty protests.

"There might be a chance, if I'm on the spot to take it. If not... I'll call you, and beam back up again; but at least I'll have tried."

"Aye, sir." Scotty sets the controls. "You'll materialise overlooking the camp, in the shelter of some bushes. There are no sentries anywhere near, and you'll get a good view. I'll set Chekov to monitoring the sensors - if anyone looks like coming near you I'll beam you up before you're seen."

"Fine, Scotty." Kirk takes his place, I join him, and the transporter effect enfolds us in its golden glow.

We materialise, as Scotty promised, in the shelter of a thick clump of bushes on the hillside overlooking the rebel camp. Though it's full night the camp is brightly lit by a circle of fires surrounding a raised platform in the centre. The rebels - including women and children - are drifting towards this focal point, their talk and laughter carrying to us on the night breeze.

Kirk touches my shoulder. "Let's get closer, Mr. Baillie. See those tents beyond the fire? That's probably where they're holding Spock. Looks like the rebels are gathering for a meeting - now if only the guards join in, we might be able to circle the camp, and reach Spock from the far side."

I nod agreement, and we make our way slowly downhill, taking advantage of the cover; the last few yards are open ground, though, and we halt to consider our next move.

In the camp a roar of greeting from the crowd heralds the appearance of a tall, commanding figure in front of the dias. Mavan - I know him from the Security file President Brand transmitted to the Enterprise.

"Bring the alien!" As the command rings out I feel Kirk stiffen at my side. The crowd stirs, opening a passage for the small group emerging from the darkness, armed men surrounding the bound captive in their midst.

There are three poles set on the platform; Spock is pushed up the steps and bound to the centre post, his outstretched arms fastened to those on either side. When he's securely fastened Mavan turns to the crowd, his upflung hand commanding silence.

"My people, tomorrow our uprising begins in earnest. The traitor Brand, thinking to oppose the will of the people, dared to enlist the help of outworlders. Does he think us children, to be so easily cowed? I know of this Federation - they are weak, betrayed by their own foolish concept of honour. It is their law not to interfere with the customs of another race unless invited. We will send this captive back to Brand as a token of our determination - and when we rule on Winifer, Starfleet will not move to avenge his death. Let the blood of this alien be the first shed in our war of conquest, an example to all who would oppose us of what their fate will be. The traitors must be destroyed, the land cleansed with blood and flame, that the old ways may return."

Odd. I've never met a reformer yet who strove to achieve his aims peacefully - unless you count Surak, but that was before my time. Always there must be death, bloodshed, destruction. However great the tyranny they think to overthrow, the liberators are so often tyrants themselves, only to a different faction. As many crimes are committed in the name of justice, liberty or religion as are committed in the open pursuit of power...

"Corrupting influences, to bolster the enemies of the people!" Mavan is continuing. "Let us give our answer to those who would sell our heritage. My people, the alien is yours - take your vengeance!"

Mavan steps back, and there's a surge of movement in the crowd. A line of women has formed at the foot of the platform; as the first mounts the steps firelight gleams from the knife in her hand. She draws near to Spock, and with slow, deliberate movements cuts his shirt from him. The second woman is young, and in other circumstances I'd have fancied her; she holds her knife to the base of Spock's throat, and Kirk makes an involuntary movement beside me. I place my hand on his shoulder, certain for a moment that events have moved too quickly for us, that she's going to kill Spock before our eyes. But no; she merely draws the knife down his chest, smiling as the bright green blood wells up in the track of the sharp point. Dipping her fingers in the blood she smears it on her cheeks, and on the face of the first woman, who is standing a little to the side.

The next rebel makes a second cut, parallelling the first at a distance of about an inch; her successor joins the two vertical lines at top and bottom. As before they smear their faces with blood before moving to the other side of Spock.

There's a slight pause; both Kirk and I are staring as though hypnotised at the bleeding rectangle outlined on the Vulcan's chest. Somewhere a distant memory stirs, and a feeling of sick horror comes over me as a long-ago lecture fills my mind.

In Security, death is an ever-present reality. I don't go looking for it, but I'm not especially afraid of it - when my time comes, it comes. Some deaths, though...

As part of our training we're familiarised with every method of torture and execution known, the thinking being that if we know what to expect, the worst fate loses much of its horror. Odd, that so much of man's ingenuity - and that of other intelligent species as well - should go into the devising of painful and degrading ways to main or destroy his fellows...

I'd heard of this particular form of death, and I'm trying to keep the realisation from showing on my face as I wonder how to shield Kirk from the sight of what's going to happen to his friend. The ribbons of flesh will be stripped from his living body - and his Vulcan strength will keep him alive and conscious far longer than any Human could endure. It's a myth that Vulcans don't feel pain; they can control their reaction to it to a certain degree, but they suffer the same torment as any sentient being.

I'm dreading the thought of what Spock's suffering will do to Kirk, forced to watch it, to know what was happening, but unable to help. To tell the truth, I'm calculating the chances of a phaser beam going unnoticed in the confusion if I can get a clear shot at Spock - and then I remember that I'm unarmed, that Kirk left our weapons on the ship. It's in my mind to slip away for a few moments, call Scotty, and get him to beam my phaser down, when the sudden, unnatural stillness of the man at my shoulder sets all my instincts alert.

"No! Not like that! Not Spock!"

What passed through Kirk's mind in those moments of horrified understanding, when he realised what Spock's death would be, I'll never know. Did he think of Starfleet, of President Brand's strict orders, of his own future? You tell me. All I do know is that before I can raise a hand to stop him he's climbed to his feet and is walking calmly and confidently down the hill. I rise to follow, then sink back into hiding, knowing that if both of us are seen it'll destroy any small

chance left.

Kirk's nearly at the camp now, quickening his step as the next woman in line begins to climb to the platform.

"Stop!" His voice rings out clearly as he walks into the circle of firelight; all eyes are turned to him, but sheer surprise, I think, holds the rebels motionless as he comes level with Mavan, passing the man without a glance as he turns and mounts the steps.

Spock inclines his head slightly in greeting. There are no protests, no explanations - each understands why Kirk has done this. Then Kirk smiles faintly and moves to unfasten the bonds that hold Spock's wrists, releasing the cruel tension; but the ropes holding the Vulcan to the centre post defeat him.

Having seen it before, I can picture the glance of reassurance that passes between them before Kirk turns away, facing the rebels who have crowded close around the platform. His gaze ranges over them, coming thoughtfully to rest on Mavan's face.

I've seen some good poker players in my time, but none to touch Kirk; he stands there, half-smiling, serenely confident in the middle of a crowd of fanatics who'd like nothing better than to tear him apart, and you'd think he's just dropped in for the regular gripe session in rec room four. His whole attitude is familiar, the tight concentration that tells me his devious mind has come up with one of his famous impossible solutions; and for a moment I dare to relax in relief.

"Mavan!" Kirk calls. "I propose a bargain."

"So, there are more of your kind in our lands. What do you seek here, offworlder?"

"The life of my First Officer."

"And what do you offer in exchange?"

"Information. The chance to escape capture, for yourself and your people."

I've wondered many times since that night what opportunity Kirk saw that I did not. There must have been something I missed... or did it, for him, come down to that impossible choice between friendship and duty? And if it did...

Sometimes I think, No, at the last he would have held to his oath, he would have seen the Vulcan's death and endured his own in silence. At other times, remembering all that he owed to Spock, I think, Yes, he would have spoken.

But who may read a man's heart, to know what prompts him to this choice or that? Not I, for sure.

Yet the choice was never asked of him; for at Kirk's words Mavan throws back his head, bellowing with mocking laughter, and I know that the Captain's gamble has failed.

"Offer me that which I do not already know, offworlder! Brand's hounds snap at our heels, he thinks to take us at dawn's light - this my spies have already told me. You bargain with worthless coin, fool, and will pay the price." Mavan beckons, and two of his men join him. "It is in my mind, however, that perhaps we should not linger. Brand is cunning, and may attack earlier than expected. Are all our people ready to leave?"

"They are," one of the men answers. "We can move out as soon as the word is given - even the torches are prepared."

"That is well. Bind this fool with his friend."

Kirk is seized and bound to the same post as Spock, while Mavan issues further low-voiced orders, then raises his voice again.

"We shall not, after all, take time to witness your deaths. We leave now, firing the camp behind us. Your bones will be found in the ashes, a symbol of our contempt for your alien corruption."

This makes bad hearing, I realise. Not only death for Kirk and Spock, but the failure of our mission - and Brand will surely blame the rebels' escape on Kirk, even though Mavan knew his plans already. I'm the only one free to act, but what can I do? I suppose I could call Scotty, and have him beam Kirk and Spock up in defiance of orders, but while that'll save their lives it'll leave Kirk wide open to a court-martial when Brand finds his prisoners gone...

Hold on, back up a minute... Call Scotty, yes - but with a very different suggestion...

The arrangements are quickly made - Scotty doesn't waste time arguing once the situation's been explained to him. I tuck my communicator away, and return my attention to the scene below.

In the few minutes I spent talking to Scotty, there's been a change - the rebels are moving away, heading for their tents, while the first to leave are re-emerging, carrying bundles, forming into small groups.

Mavan is still at the foot of the platform, but is now mounted on a great black horse, a flaming torch in his hand. His warriors are urging the people to hurry, but it's an orderly evacuation.

Mavan laughs mockingly at his prisoners. "Your pyre will be lit first," he calls, "and you may watch our departure through the flames - for a short time!"

"Come on, Scotty!" I mutter, having always had a dislike for last-minute, cavalry-to-the-rescue endings - perhaps because I've been on the receiving end of too many in my time; but even as I speak there's a familiar high-pitched sound, and the entire camp is bathed in the rays of a starship's phasers, set on wide angle and heavy stun.

The reaction is immediate. The rebels drop in their tracks, Mavan and his horse go down without a sound, and within minutes the entire camp is still.

As soon as the firing stops I'm up and running, because I can see that the torch that fell from Mavan's hand is licking at the base of the platform. The wood is barely smouldering, easily stamped out, and I'm soon able to turn my attention to the prisoners.

They're both hanging limply in the ropes, unconscious but otherwise unhurt. I cut them free, swearing when I see how tightly they've been fastened, and aware of the low humming that fills the camp as red-shirted Security guards materialise around me, the back-up squad I summoned at the same time I called Scotty.

"How are they?" McCoy, down with the first party, reaches me as I lower Spock to the ground.

"You're the doctor - you tell me," I grin as I make room for him.

His scanner sounds, and he grunts resignedly. "Heavily stunned, but they should wake up soon. Mind you, a phaser blast's no joke on any setting - I'll keep an eye on them until they come round."

"Mind if I leave you to it?" I climb to my feet. "Some of us have work to do around here, you know." With that I move off before he has

time to come up with one of his clever answers.

I'm kept pretty busy for the next couple of hours, but finally I'm able to hand over to Hallam and go back to make my report. Kirk still looks somewhat groggy, but Spock is back to normal, though slightly paler than usual to a discerning eye.

Kirk hears me out without asking too many awkward questions, but I sense he's just about to start when we're interrupted by the arrival of the cavalry - Brand's troops - just about two hours too late to be of any practical use. Their commander looks a little bit put out to find his job already done for him, but that's nothing to the explosion of fury when Brand arrives shortly afterwards.

"Captain Kirk, I demand an explanation! I expressly forbade any interference, and you defied me. Starfleet Command will hear of this! Had anything gone wrong - had the rebels learned of our intentions..."

"Sir, Mavan already knew of your plan." Kirk's been listening in uncharacteristic silence, and when he does speak something in the tone of his voice makes me look at him sharply - and I have the sudden horrible feeling that Kirk's going to put his foot in it.

As long as the President thinks that Kirk's actions were part of a carefully thought out plan he might - once he's calmed down - be persuaded that in view of the successful outcome there's no need to press charges; but if he once gets the idea that the phaser blast on the camp was my contribution to the gaiety of nations, he'll be out for blood - Kirk's.

Too damned honest, that's Kirk's problem. His scheme went wrong, and rather than claim credit for something I did, he'll hand himself over on a plate, gift-wrapped for court martial.

Dark eyes meet mine, and I know that Spock has reached the same conclusion. Quite what to do about it, though, is another problem, one that's taken out of our hands temporarily when Kirk turns white, sags, and pitches forward into Spock's arms.

"Damned phasers!" McCoy is on his knees at once, reaching for his hypo.

"President Brand, perhaps I might explain." Leaving Kirk to McCoy, Spock rises to face the irate man. "Captain Kirk's concern for his crew is well known. He realised that there was a way to rescue me without risking the escape of the rebels, but time was short, and he did not wish to waste time trying to persuade you - he knows the capabilities of a starship, you do not. He beamed down with Security Chief Baillie, placed himself in considerable danger to locate me, and then signalled Mr. Baillie to order phasers fired when he was certain that the rebels had gathered to concentrate on us.

I might also point out, sir, that by his action he ensured that our purpose was accomplished without the loss of a single one of your men, and that none of the rebels escaped, as they might have done had you attempted to round them up as you originally intended.

Moreover, as the Captain said, Mavan knew of your plans from spies in your headquarters. Without the Captain's intervention your men would have found a deserted camp at best, at worst they would have walked into a trap, and been slaughtered."

There was a Romulan commander once who believed Vulcans couldn't lie. If she'd witnessed that off-the-cuff performance, she'd have changed her mind fast.

Brand is looking thoughtful. "I had not considered that. Indeed, you are right, Commander - Captain Kirk's actions have saved us heavy losses. I was too hasty - I should have listened." He turns to Kirk, who's regained his feet and is looking a little bewildered at the speed with which he's been transformed from villain into hero.

"Captain, my apologies. I will inform Starfleet Command that your judgement was wiser than mine."

Spock decides to improve the shining hour. "Sir, might I suggest that your report to Starfleet simply states that the Captain acted with your knowledge and approval? It will simplify explanations."

"Do you agree, Captain?"

"Uh... yes, sir."

"So be it. May I ask where the rebels are now?"

"Mr. Baillie?"

"On the Enterprise, sir, under close confinement in the hanger deck. Mr. Scott reports that we can leave orbit as soon as the landing party beams up."

"Then complete your mission, Captain, and transfer the rebels to Enav. On your return we will together compile a report that will satisfy Starfleet Command."

I leave about then to see that the camp has been cleared and the rebels' possessions have been transferred to the ship. The remaining Security guards beam up, and a short time later only Kirk, Spock, McCoy and I are left to watch as Brand leads his men away.

As soon as they're out of earshot, Kirk glances at the Vulcan.

"You just saved my career, Spock."

"Not I, Captain. It was Mr. Baillie."

Kirk turns to me. "Thanks," he says softly, then adds in a tone of wonder, "but what sort of a Security Chief have I got? Don't act so innocent - I saw that look you gave Spock. You, Mr. Baillie, have managed to corrupt a totally logical Vulcan into telling the biggest pack of lies I've heard in years."

Well, I can't let that go, can I? It's not as if I put the words into Spock's mouth, it was all his own idea. There's something I read once that I've been saving up, waiting for the opportunity to use on Kirk. Taking a deep breath, I put on my best expression of righteous indignation and injured innocence.

"What, sir? Who, sir? Me, sir? With respect, sir - no, sir!"

HAPPINESS IS A WARM... DRAGON.

There are plenty of places I'd a darned sight sooner be than sitting in a draughty cave in the middle of a Vellian thunderstorm watching Sulu and Lt. Standish crooning over a bunch of wilted plants as though they'd just found gold at the rainbow's end. Since I'm about as useful in that area as a sick headache, and since I always was of a practical turn of mind, I'm engaged in heating coffee from the supplies I had the forethought to bring down, wondering meanwhile how long this storm will last, and wishing that some engineering genius in Starfleet would come up with a transporter system that won't turn temperamental on us at every electrical disturbance.

Our Science Department are happy as sandboys on Vellia, even now; apart from the botany class, there's Parker from Geology, with his assistant, Helen Vale. Oh, and Spock, of course. He's sitting over in the corner already absorbed in correlating data, sublimely unconscious of the subdued chatter of the others. (Truth to tell, it's as much for his sake as anything that I've got the coffee on - he's soaked to the skin, and I can just imagine the look I'll get from Kirk if I bring back a shivering Vulcan. Besides, the thought of Spock pretending not to be suffering from a cold isn't a prospect I relish.)

As soon as it's ready, I start handing out the coffee; Sulu and Standish break off just long enough to thank me, but Parker beckons me down to show me what he and Vale find so interesting.

Basically, it's a pile of loose rock samples that they've gathered out on the surface; but they've been weathered into some curious shapes, and I amuse myself turning them over until one in particular attracts my attention.

"Hey Parker - can I have this?"

He looks over to see what I've found. "Sure, Chief - I've got several samples of that rock. Interesting shape, isn't it? Simple explanation, of course - the rock's pretty soft, and the extremes of weather on Vellia did the rest... I had one a few minutes ago that looks a bit like a Romulan Warbird... see?"

"Mmm, yes - but I'd rather have this one." Really, the resemblance to a dragon's head is remarkable - the ridged eye-sockets, the long narrow snout, even the suggestion of a crest on the back of the head.

I'm carrying it as I move over to the last member of the party.

"Coffee, Mr. Spock?"

"Thank you, Mr. Baillie. What have you there?"

"Just a weathered rock Parker found - I couldn't resist it." As I hold it out to show him I could swear his lips curve the merest fraction, and he cocks an eyebrow at me.

"Berengaria, Mr. Baillie?"

"Well... yes. It does rather remind me." Somehow, I'd known he hadn't forgotten...

As a young, newly-promoted lieutenant in Security, only recently transferred to the U.S.S. Enterprise, it's a surprise to me when I'm assigned to one of the first shore-leave parties on Berengaria.

Berengaria! On a thousand planets children's eyes light up at the

sound of that name, for only on that planet in all the galaxy are the ancient, magical words a reality. "Here be dragons." Real, honest-to-goodness, fire-breathing, flying dragons, as specified in all the best fairy tales. It'd been my ambition all my life to see one, and now I'd have the chance.

Perhaps. Trouble is, they're shy, timid beasts, living high in the mountains, shunning man so completely that out of the many thousands who've sought them, only a handful have been lucky enough to see one.

So elusive are they, that even today many people doubt their existence, calling them hallucinations, the fulfillment of wishful thinking. They've never been photographed, they don't register on a tricorder, except as very confused, blurred readings - not even a Starship's sensors can locate them, for the creatures seem to have the ability to know when they're being probed, and to... well, vanish is the only way I can put it. This adds to their fairy-tale quality, of course, but only the indignant insistence of the Berengarians and the unimpeachable testimony of a few offworlders whose word cannot be doubted confirms their existence at all. But they exist. Oh yes, they exist.

On this shore leave I do down with Danvers and Trelawney from Security. We're all of the opinion that a small group stands a far better chance of finding something than if we go in a large party, as some of the others are planning to do. We set up camp on a small plateau high in the mountains, and settle down to figure out the best way to begin our search.

Normally, we'd never dream of climbing alone, but we're young, enthusiastic - and a bit reckless. The weather report is good, we have our communicators in case of trouble, so we decide that to cover the maximum territory we'll each take a different route to explore. Not that we know exactly what we're looking for - but as Trelawney says, fire-breathing dragons are bound to scorch a few rocks here and there, which would seem as good an indication as any. The plan is that whichever of us finds traces will call the others by communicator, and we'll concentrate our search in that area.

For the first four days all goes well - no sign of dragons, but the fresh, clean air and the unhurried exercise help me to unwind after the tension caused by my unexpected promotion, my transfer to a new ship, and the general all-round trouble that's Security's daily lot.

On the fifth day, trouble. I'm edging my way gingerly across a slope of loose rocks when a shadow across the sun makes me instinctively glance up; it's only one of the enormous birds of prey common in the Berengarian mountains, but I pay dearly for my moment of inattention as a rock shifts under my foot and I go crashing down the slope on a moving carpet of dislodged stones.

There's nothing to catch hold of to break my descent, no protection from the falling rocks. I can feel blood running down my face, my left arm is certainly broken, and I'm not too sure about the rest of me. The only thing I do know with any clarity is that the slope I'm riding terminates abruptly in a drop of several hundred feet to the flank of the mountain below.

"So much for fairy tales, Baillie!" I mutter to myself as I go skidding down at an ever-increasing rate. "If I ever get out of this..." The thought is never completed as I spin crazily around and collide with something very solid and unyielding.

I'm wakened by a persistent, tickling irritation on my face, a rough but at the same time gentle sensation of something - an insect, perhaps - crawling across my skin. I raise my arm to brush it away, and the pain brings me fully awake as the edges of the broken bone grate together.

I'm lying on my side gazing straight out into space, the reassuring solidity of rock at my back, a sheer drop in front of me. I sit up carefully, nursing my arm; my whole body's aching, and my head feels like I've spent four days in a Rigellian nightclub. At least I'm relatively safe, lying on a ledge a few feet below the drop. The avalanche of rocks has stopped, so there's no danger from above, and the ledge is solid and firm, removing my fear that it might crumble and send me flying.

Even my communicator is still attached to my belt, as I discover when I reach for it; at that point my luck runs out, though, because my call to the Enterprise produces only a crackle of static - the communicator must have been damaged in the fall.

There's no need to panic, I tell myself. It's still working after a fashion, and the odds are that I'll be able to reach Danvers and Trelawney - they can't be too far away. And even if they are out of range of the damaged communicator, they'll know something's wrong when I don't show up at the camp by nightfall, and they'll come looking for me in the morning.

I'd sooner not spend the night in the open, though. It's bitterly cold at this height after dark, and if I don't manage to stay awake, the chances are that I'll roll off the ledge during the night.

I adjust the communicator to general broadcast. "Baillie here. Anyone receiving, please respond. This is a distress call."

I repeat the message several times, and at last there's a response; fragmented, distorted by static, but at least someone has heard me.

"... receiving you. Please state position..."

Tensely, I give my coordinates, hoping the communicator is transmitting more efficiently than it's receiving, and await a reply from my unknown rescuer - the static is too strong for me to recognise the voice.

"... lower slopes. Can you determine... injuries?"

"A broken arm, some minor cuts, possibly mild concussion," I report.

"... doctor standing by... not attempt to move... receiving me?"

"Understood. There's a lot of static, but you're coming through."

"...leaving now. Estimate arrival... Out."

I tuck the communicator safely away, feeling slightly more cheerful now I know that help is coming, and edge round to get a better look at my refuge, closing my eyes against a wave of dizziness produced by a careless movement of my head. When I open them again, I'm facing along the ledge to my right, where it widens out considerably into a smooth platform before the dark mouth of a cave; and sprawled out on the sun-warmed rock, watching me intently, is a real, live dragon.

He's just like I'd imagined, just as all the story books had described him. About twenty feet long - excluding the barbed tail which doubles his size. And he's even green - the delicate, fresh green of new leaves, shading to pale yellow underneath. The wings are folded, but present, as described, a glowing rainbow of purple and violet and gold. He yawns, his mouth a crimson cavern edged with sharp, white teeth

like daggers, and an impossibly long, forked tongue flickers out to coil around the long narrow snout.

I must admit I jump a bit - well, few of the stories hint at a gentle dragon - and at the movement the enormous eyes blink at me in almost comical surprise. He shifts position restlessly, his tail twitching dangerously close - one move could knock me off my suddenly precarious perch - and gives a low, throaty rumble.

"Easy, boy." I put all the confidence and reassurance I can muster into my admittedly shaking voice. "Easy now - I won't hurt you."

Now there's a stupid remark if you like! One very scared, suddenly very fragile-feeling, six-foot-odd Human male, earnestly assuring a forty-foot dragon that he won't hurt it! Not that I could, anyway - the Berengarians don't like us bringing weapons down on shore leave, and my phaser's back on the ship.

After a few minutes of the pair of us sitting staring blankly at each other, the dragon rumbles again, and edges closer. I think about retreating, but there simply isn't anywhere to go - to my left the ledge narrows after only a few feet. Soon it's too late to move anyway, because one enormous clawed foot is resting on my leg, and the great golden eyes are peering inquisitively into my face.

The tongue flickers out again, travelling delicately over my head and shoulders; and believe me, I'm praying that I don't taste too good, because I have the nasty feeling that I've been marked down as a prospective dinner.

I'd give a lot for one of those fairy tale wizards to turn up - well, all the best wizards are supposed to have a sure-fire spell for getting rid of dragons - and those teeth are unpleasantly close. In the absence of any such useful character, though, I reckon my best bet is to remain perfectly still, and hope that the beast isn't too hungry.

The weight on my leg shifts a little, and to my surprise the dragon rolls over onto his side, one hind leg raised into the air; he whimpers pleadingly, and his position reminds me irresistably of a dog I had once - he lay down and whimpered like that when he wanted his tummy tickled.

"Ridiculous!" I mutter. "Whoever heard of a dragon looking to be petted?"

You'd swear the beast understands, because he whimpers again, and nudges my arm with his snout. Oh well, it's worth trying... I reach out very cautiously and rub my hand over the surprisingly soft yellow skin.

At once an expression of sheer, idiotic bliss crosses the dragon's face; he gives a little moan of unmistakeable pleasure, and wriggles ecstatically, his eyes half-closed with sheer enjoyment. I can't help it - I begin to laugh. After all, here I am, with a broken arm and other injuries I'm not too sure about, stuck halfway up a mountain with - of all things - an affectionate dragon.

It seems the beast likes the sound of my voice, because a low rumbling kindles deep in his throat.

"The books didn't mention this either," I tell my companion. "I don't think dragons are supposed to purr."

Supposed to or not, this one definitely is. In fact, as time passes, the sound lulls me into a dreamy haze - so much so, that the sudden clatter of rocks below startles me for a moment until I realise that my rescue party must have arrived.

"Excuse me," I tell the dragon, and wriggle round until I'm able to watch the first man scramble over the ledge.

It had to be! I tell myself resignedly. Get into trouble on your first shore leave from a new ship, and have to be rescued by the First Officer in person.

Spock's followed by Jimenez, one of the junior medics, and a couple of men from Security; this makes the ledge pretty crowded, and I grin apologetically.

"Sorry about the lack of space - I don't think my friend here wants to move."

"Your friend?" Spock's eyebrows vanish into his hair, and Jimenez, in the act of pulling out his scanner, looks at me worriedly.

"The dragon. He's been keeping me company for..."

At the sight of their carefully-blank faces I turn my head; although I can still feel the warm weight against my leg, the ledge appears to be empty.

"There is a dragon," I assure them earnestly. "If you'd just feel..."

"Don't worry about it now," Jimenez says brightly. "Let's have a look at you, Baillie... Hmm, yes, a broken arm... and that's a bad bruise, possibly concussion... I think he'd better beam directly up to the ship, Mr. Spock."

"As you advise." The Vulcan pulls out his communicator, and as the two guards help me to my feet I lose my final proof as the weight lifts from my leg. Patterson follows the direction of my gaze, grins, and I have the nasty suspicion that I'm never going to be allowed to live this one down.

"I was not concussed. There was a dragon, whether you saw it or not."

"Sure there was. St. George too... and perhaps a damsel in distress?"

One of these days I'm going to murder Patterson - slowly. He's spread the story all over the ship, and those idiots think it's the biggest joke for years. There's nothing more frustrating than being disbelieved when you know you're telling the truth - but the more I try to convince them, the louder they laugh.

In despair I glance around the rec room, looking for support, but in vain; the only person not grinning like a Cheshire cat is Spock, who's sitting at the next table poring over a chess board.

Something about his tense expression makes me forget everyone else for the moment, and I find myself watching him with curiosity, wondering what it's like for him to be the only one of his race on board; even though he's half Human it doesn't show, and I guess he must get pretty lonely at times. He's respected by the crew, but he doesn't seem to have any friends... irritating though mine can be at times, I can't imagine not having any.

Just then the rec room door opens, and his face... changes, softening into an expression of shy welcome; then almost at once the frozen mask is back in place, so quickly it's hard to believe it ever lifted.

Looking round, I see that the Captain has come in, with Gary Mitchell at his side, and it's clear what happened. On the way to sickbay after my rescue we'd met the Captain in the lift, and he'd arranged a chess game with Spock; but he's obviously got caught up with Mitchell and forgotten - leaving the Vulcan to hide a bitter disappointment.

"Hey Gary - have you heard about Baillie's dragon?"

Something very slow, very painful for Patterson, I decide as the

navigator and the Captain pause by our table.

"McCoy gave you a thorough check-up, of course?" Kirk is smiling too, but his eyes are concerned - I'll say this for him, he worries about every member of his crew.

"I'm fully fit, Captain," I assure him. "The doctor fixed my arm."

"But not the hallucinations," Mitchell chuckles.

"Look, for the last time - I did see the dragon!" I snap somewhat irritably.

"Oh, come on, Baillie! You can't expect us to believe..."

"Mr. Baillie is perfectly correct." A cool, dispassionate voice breaks into the laughter. "There was a dragon on the ledge. I saw it as I arrived, but it vanished almost immediately - I assume it was made nervous by the arrival of so many people. It is curious, gentlemen, that you should find it necessary to doubt Mr. Baillie's word."

"This is a conspiracy!" Mitchell grins. "You're joking, Spock - admit it."

"Vulcans do not make jokes."

"But..."

"That's enough, Gary. If Mr. Spock says he saw the dragon, it was there," Kirk says firmly, eyeing me with a new respect. "Sorry I doubted your word, Baillie."

"Understandable, Captain," I tell him, shooting a triumphant glance at the open-mouthed Patterson. "I'm just glad Mr. Spock was able to confirm the sighting. Thank you, sir."

The Vulcan inclines his head. "If you will excuse me, Captain?"

As he turns to leave Mitchell grabs Kirk's arm. "Coming for a drink, Jim?"

"Not tonight, Gary." Kirk's barring Spock's path. "Mr. Spock, I thought we had a game planned for tonight?"

"It is unimportant, sir, if you wish to..."

"I wish to try out that move you showed me - I've been looking forward to this game."

"Then..." Spock gestures Kirk to a seat at the table, and within minutes both men are lost in the intricacies of the game.

"I'll never understand Jim!" Mitchell sighs as he joins our group. "Heaven only knows what he finds so interesting in that Vulcan."

"Oh, I don't know." I lift my glass from the table. "I have a feeling that Mr. Spock has a few surprises in store for us - and for the Captain."

Well, he's done that all right, over the years. I sometimes wonder if Kirk did notice that fleeting moment of vulnerability so long ago... but if he did, he's had cause to be grateful for that act of kindness many times since that day...

The gradually-penetrating dampness of the cave breaks in on my memories, and I rummage in the medical kit for a light thermal blanket.

Spock glances up as I drop it around his shoulders, and the faint hint of a smile still lingering in the dark eyes gives me the nerve to mention something that's been puzzling me for years.

"Mr. Spock... about that time on Berengaria... when I saw the dragon..."

"Yes, Mr. Baillie?"

"Sir, at the time I was so glad of your confirmation that I didn't think of it, but later I got to remembering... Even a Vulcan would have shown some reaction on seeing a dragon unexpectedly like that, made some comment, at least... but you said nothing. You didn't see it, did you?"

"No, Mr. Baillie, I did not."

"Then why did you say you had?"

"Because..." A faint tinge of green colours his face, and he glances round to make sure there's no-one within earshot. "Many years ago, Mr. Baillie, a small boy ran to his parents to tell them of the marvellous dragon he had seen. No-one believed him, either..."

"Then you...?"

"Indeed. In fact, I was fortunate enough to encounter three of the creatures - a family group. My father was displeased... he thought I had been daydreaming, a most regrettable Human trait... From your description and my own experience, I knew that you had indeed seen a dragon, for you could not have described its appearance and behaviour so perfectly if you had not - and I thought..."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock." For a moment I have this gorgeous image of a small, solemn Vulcan child carefully tickling a large dragon... "You sure made things easier for me."

"I am pleased to have helped." The smile is clear in his eyes for a moment before he returns his attention to his tricorder.

Three hours later the storm has blown itself out, we're in contact with the Enterprise, and the landing party is gathering to beam up. I turn to find Spock at my elbow.

"Mr. Baillie," he murmurs quietly, "may I ask... what impressed you most about the dragon?"

"Its size, I guess," I tell him, remembering. "Forty feet from nose to tail - it was some size of a beast."

"Then it may interest you to know - I told you that my dragons were a family unit?" He pauses, and believe it or not, his eyes are warm with suppressed laughter. "Mr. Baillie, you were indeed fortunate - the dragon you encountered that day was very young, I would estimate less than a year old... and the Berengarians estimate the life-span of a dragon at some three thousand Terran years. You were - what is the term? babysitting? with a very young dragon."

"I thought," I remind him, "that Vulcans don't make jokes."

"Jokes, Mr. Baillie?" An eyebrow disappears into his fringe. "I see no joke in a simple statement of fact. The creature you encountered was an infant of the species."

"When I was a kid," I tell him, "I had a book called, 'Happiness is a warm puppy. Makes me wonder, Mr. Spock - do you suppose there's a Berengarian equivalent?"

For just a minute I think he's going to answer, but before he can we're caught up in the transporter beam. Just as well, really - I don't think Vulcan dignity would have stood up very well if he'd realised the picture that's in my mind. Tribbles are one thing - but dragons?